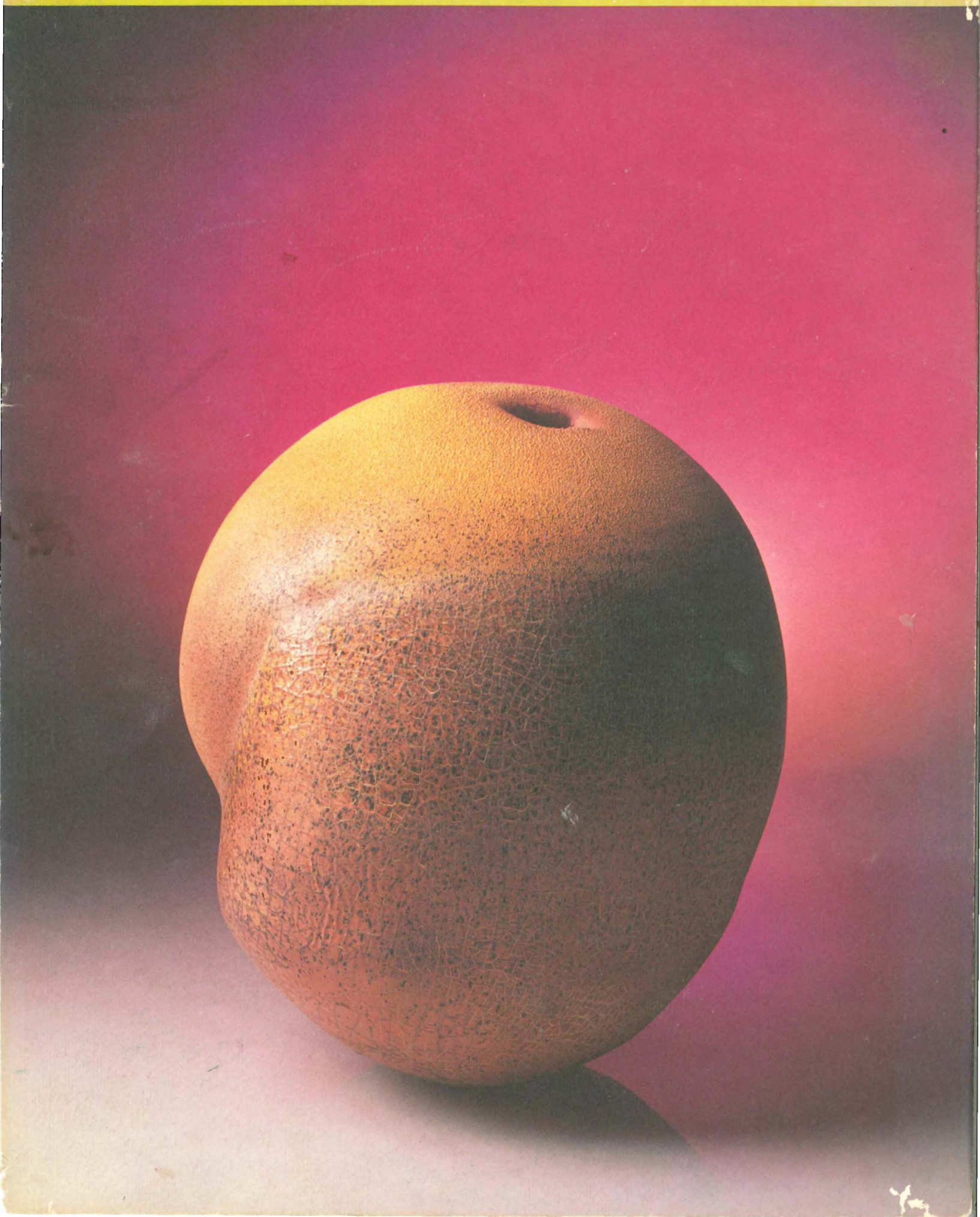
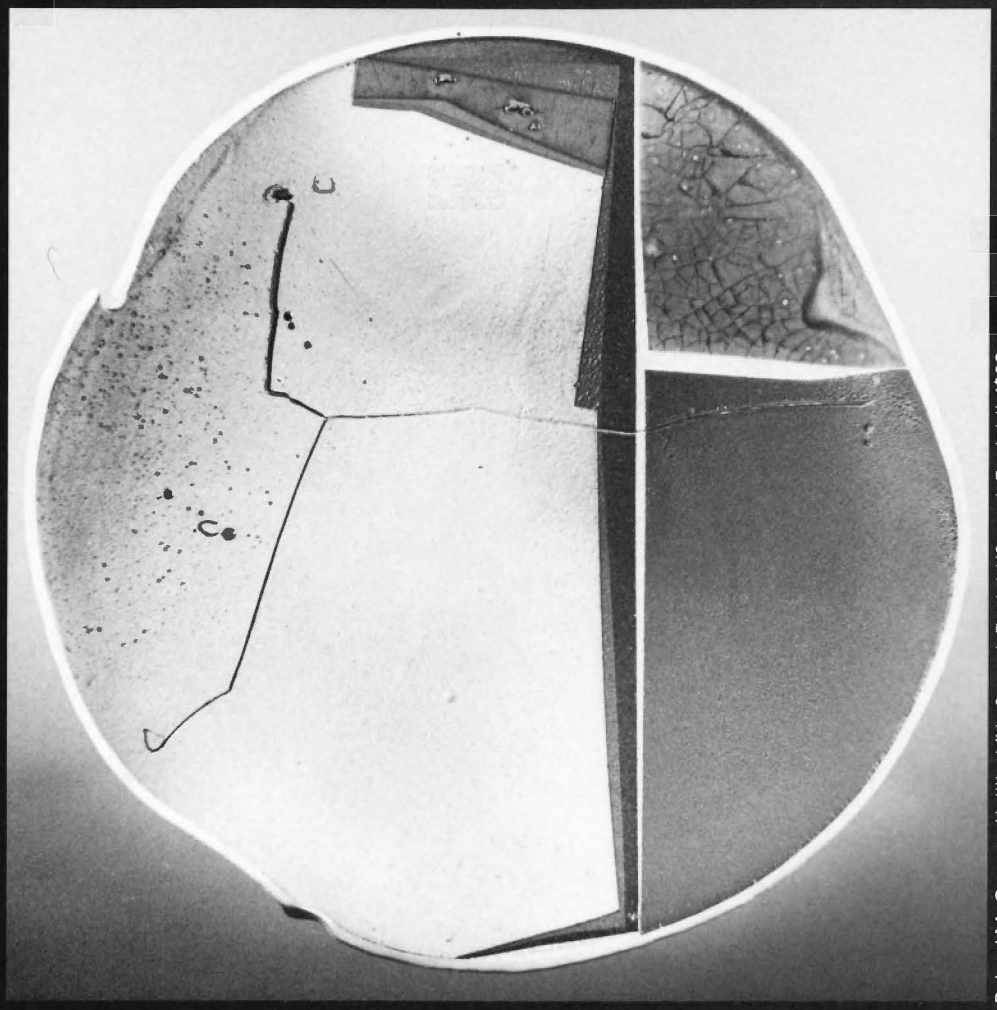
AMERICAN CERAMICS 1/4





Robert McGowan, *Untitled (No Sounds Tonight/Sounds Tonight)*, 1982
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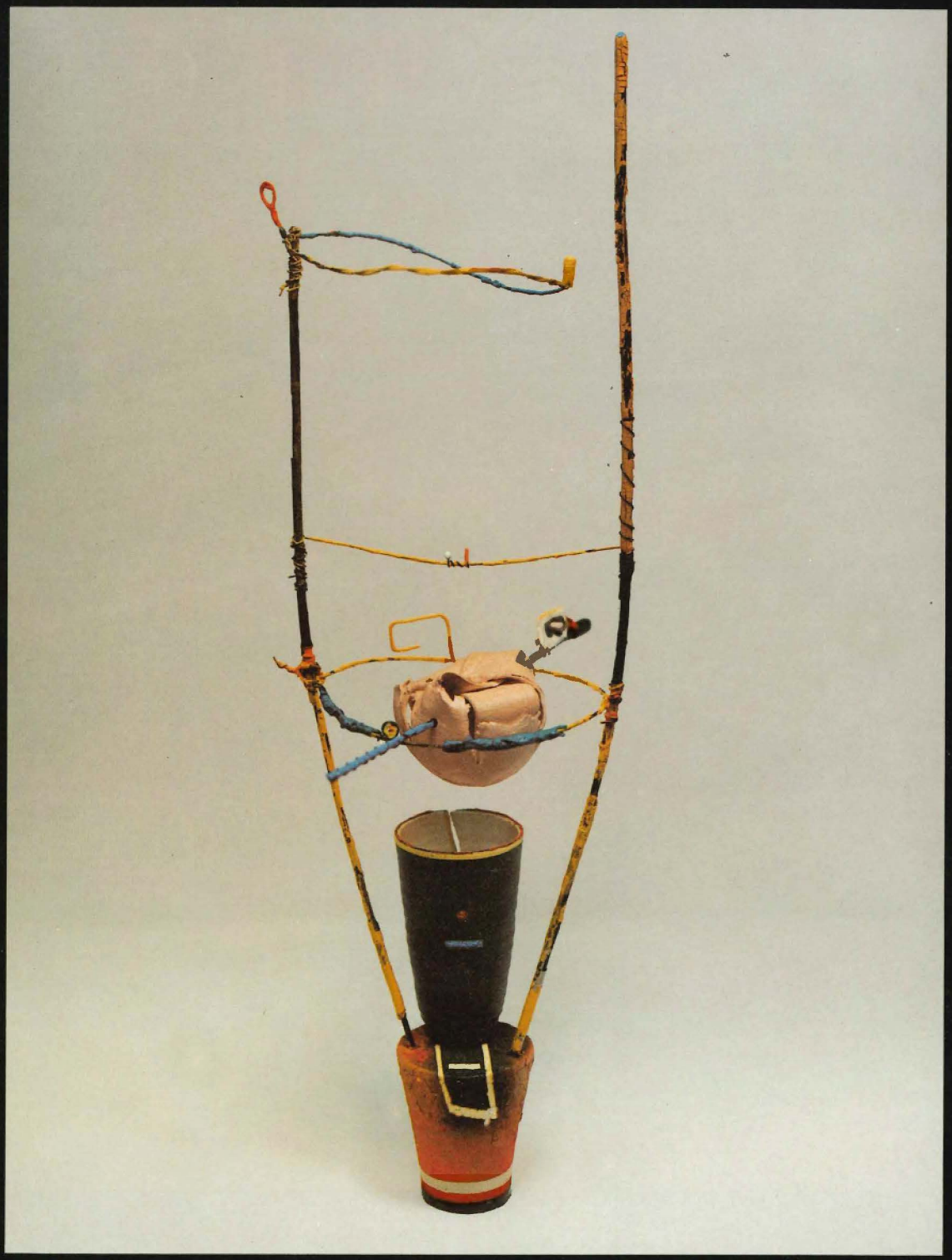

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The Ceramic Art Quarterly
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(Cover) Wolley Zuff *(1982) by Harvey Goldman, 13¼" (33.75 cm) high. Courtesy Impressions Gallery, Boston. Photo: Brad Guice.*

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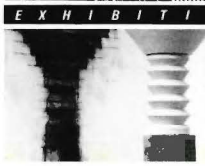

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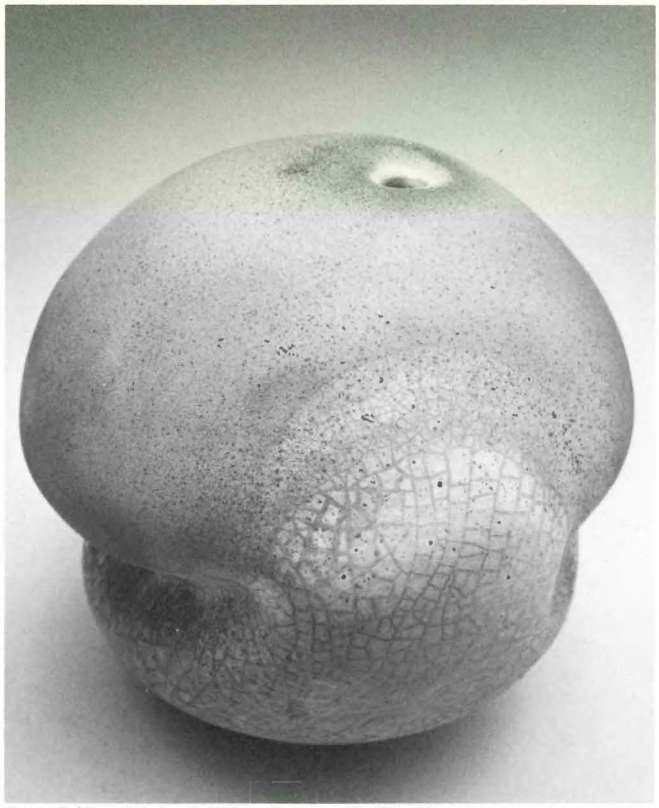

Harvey Goldman, "Zin Zang", 1982, earthenware, 13" x 12" x 11"

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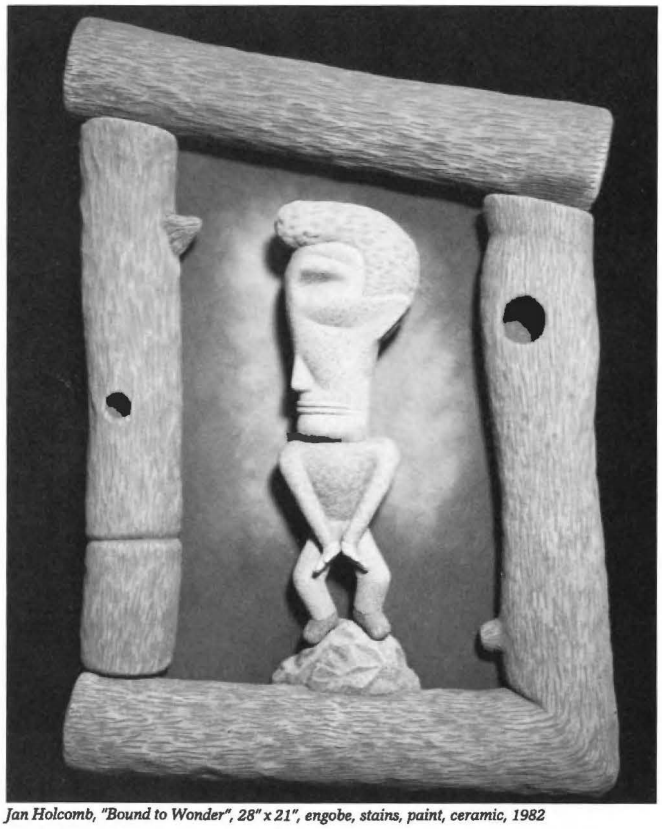
October, 1982



Jan Holcomb, "Bound to Wonder", 28" x 21", engobe, stains, paint, ceramic, 1982

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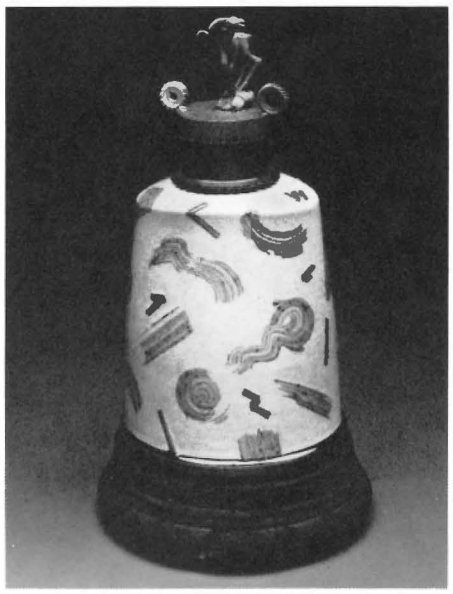

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Philip Cornelius: The Container Continuum

Joanne Burstein

At some point in the dim, dim future, when archaeologists of another civilization dig through the rubble of this one, they may conclude that ours was a culture of metalsmiths and ceramists. Gone will be our entire written culture, but for the inscriptions on government buildings; gone will be the talismans of our high culture. Even now our films, paintings, and architecture are disintegrating as we look at them. But if the *Venus of Willendorf* is any indication, some of the remaining artifacts will be made of clay.

For Philip Cornelius, as for many contemporary potters and clay artists, this is one of the philosophical attractions of the material. If the cultural continuum of man's history on the planet is a series of random artifacts, then the clay container is the first and most often recurring conceptual relic. Architectural and ritual artifacts are fragments of a whole we will never know—probably not visually and certainly not in cultural context—while a few shards of a vessel can make reconstruction of the whole form possible. Furthermore, the idiom of the container has led to a proliferation of repeated forms in a genre; no matter how many water jugs, storage jars, or wine cups have been broken, a significant number have managed to survive.

Never before have man's utilitarian needs been so completely met by the goods of mass production, thus bypassing the individual training and craftsmanship of the uniquely made domestic or commercial object. The genetic urge in man to produce for his own needs or for those of his immediate culture—whether by creating pots, clothing, or shelter—has been displaced by the immense industry and economic imperative of modern capitalist culture—an imperative that depends on the impermanence and mutability of those objects.

But what of that need to create—to create in the historical continuum? Here in the United States, colonialism and technology have accomplished what the Black Plague, the Hundred Years War, or the chaos of the Six Dynasties could not do elsewhere; persons in tune with that historical continuum have faced a vacuum as liberating as a new continent to be explored. The aesthetic of the container, or "vessel," has burst forth in a hundred directions at once. This attention to the container, in its present transformation, combines the influence of any number of previous cultural traditions (often secondhand via photographic reproductions and isolated museum experiences), the current high level of handcraft technology, and an exponentially rising amount of technical information.

Philip Cornelius discovered art in the U,S. Armed Services library. After Army duty, he abandoned his training in the natural sciences and returned to college to study art. Like many contemporary clay artists, he took one ceramics course and was hooked. Peter Voulkos was then revolutionizing ceramics, but his high-powered "speedy" approach didn't appeal to Cornelius. What did appeal to him was the honesty of Voulkos's approach to clay—ceramics was about clay and not a "look" or a finish or a production item. This Cornelius could relate to a former love of his own—geology.

While the techniques and philosophy of production pottery did not hold Cornelius's interest, he did learn a great deal about the value of repetition. Not the repetition of salable objects for economic survival, but the repetition for that one-in-a-hundred piece you would learn from. At San Jose State University, he also learned a great deal about the chemistry of ceramics from Herbert Saunders, probably this country's master glaze technician. His first real aesthetic influence, however, was Doug Laurie, who preceded him as a student at Scripps College. It was also at Scripps that he studied under Paul Soldner and learned the fine art of learning by doing.

One thing Cornelius shared with Soldner, more by temperament than by example, was the contribution of accident to the creative process. In 1970, while Cornelius was making some large platters, a thin slab of residue stoneware came loose from the plaster bat. This intriguing sheet of clay demanded investigation, so he cut open his paper coffee cup and, using it as a template, constructed an identical cup from the paper-thin stoneware. To prove to himself that nothing so fragile could survive a firing, he included it in the next kiln load. Amazingly, it held together and the first "thinware" piece was completed. He again challenged the medium by switching to porcelain, that most fragile clay body. Over the ensuing years, Cornelius developed these pieces into ever more complex forms, finally settling on the teapot—the most complex of utilitarian ceramic forms.

Parallel to the development of thinware, Cornelius was also pursuing his interest in a contemporary method of charcoal firing. Working with extremely heavy, wheel-thrown, lidded jars—similar in feeling to the Iga and Shino ware he had long admired, he sought to achieve in a modern gas kiln the charcoal-fired surfaces obtained in the old Japanese village kilns. This quest took him to Japan in 1977, where he spent several months observing firsthand the feel, the scale, and the texture of the work directly. He came away inspired by the excellence of their technique, developed over centuries, and feeling that much of Western expertise was facile, rather than deeply experienced.

At this point chance intervened again. Walter Cleveland, a former student who had also spent time in Japan, came back to Pasadena to work with Cornelius. By comparing notes on their independent

Lockheed *(1981), 9" (23 cm) high, porcelain. Courtesy Meyer Breier Weiss, San Francisco.*

efforts to add charcoal to a gas kiln during the firing, they got almost instant results in an intense and rewarding period of collaboration. Not one to leave two such extremes as the thinware and the heavy charcoal pieces unsynthesized, Cornelius soon subjected the fragile porcelain works to the rigors of the charcoal fire. He remembers how certain he was that it couldn't work, but once again the clay itself possessed resiliency and permanence of unsuspected strength.

To the contemporary clay artist, pursuit of the vessel as the technical and aesthetic starting point—as canvas is for the painter—necessitates the balance between unique innovation and historical consciousness we see in Cornelius's work. During the sixties, for example, he threw large (two to three feet high), traditional storage jars, which he glaze painted with a repeated naturalistic motif, most notedly the salamander. This use of pattern as a decorative device (long before its discovery by the artworld) is an authentic expression of this craft-based idiom.

In the heavy stoneware jars, the conscious reference to Japanese tradition is mitigated by the clearly Western geometry of the forms. The faceted surfaces of much of the work achieves greater austerity than did his earlier patterns, allowing light and surface texture to serve where painterly image had gone before. These works clearly speak to a historical continuum, but in a new language. Part of this exploration has to do with sheer mass—how much clay can be used in a container and still be a container.

The thinware, on the other hand, is the result of a totally new exploration. There were no antecedents or technical guidelines. Cornelius felt the openness of this situation demanded a new formal aesthetic. The form that emerged relates directly to the aerodynamic spirit of our immediate culture: the airplane wing and the glider, for example. Not only are these pieces made of the thinnest possible slabs of porcelain, but the teapot body is just wide enough to stand, the handle just large enough to accommodate the hand, the spout just large enough to allow liquid to flow through. Like the airplane or the glider, the pattern of assembled parts that combine to construct the whole are straightforward and visually self-evident. Each segment of the teapot—spout, handle, lid—is a clear structural statement that performs its function while referring to the original flat slab it was cut from. The body has very candid nips and tucks which allow the slab to bulge and curve. And the cut-pattern method of assembly is true to the initial template method Cornelius used to construct the first thinware piece. This is the structural candor the architects of functionalism longed for.

The impulse to apply pattern also finds a new synthesis in the thinware teapots. Many of the bodies have rows of small bulges or X's that are now structural, not superficial, decoration. These patterns converse with the random color flashes of orange and charcoal black on the surface. Cornelius has added patterned glaze dots and X's to his newest pieces. These make a strong, almost graphic statement, the result of layered glazes, the structure of the pots themselves, and the patterns made by the kiln's fire. But the motivating concept is the teapot, with all of its historical references and associations. This is the conceptual teapot, the most complex amalgam of interrelated forms in the potter's vocabulary. In reality quite functional, it is more clearly a statement of an ideal aesthetic that makes actual use unnecessary. It meets all of the requirements of the idea of teapot, and does so completely within the physical parameters of "thinware" and the aesthetic canons of sophisticated decorative art.

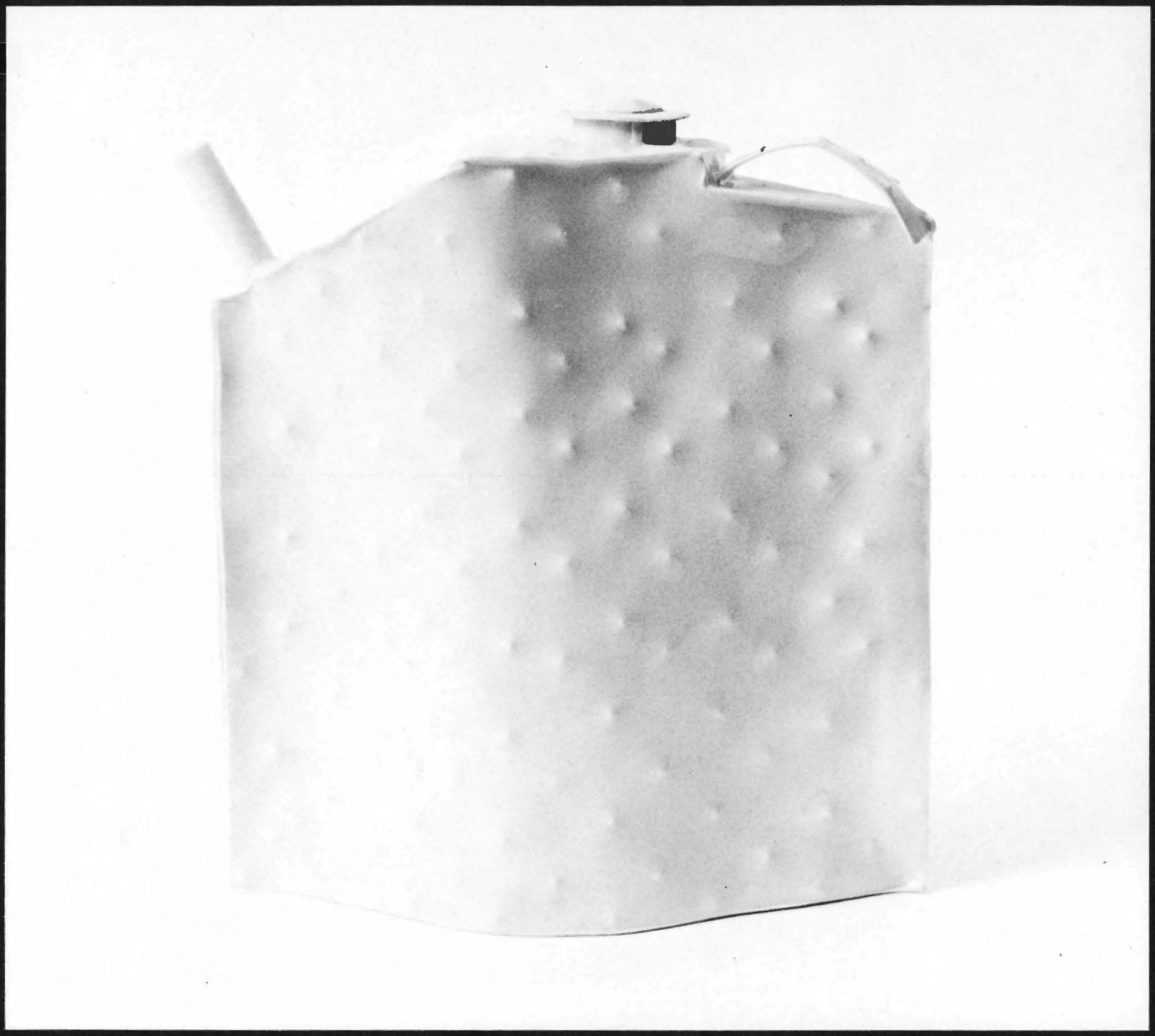
The work of Philip Cornelius, like that of Peter Voulkos, Ron Nagle, and Ken Price, shows the strength of American individualism and isolation as it is enriched by the conscious awareness of all that has gone before. The dedication to work for its own sake and as its own reward, rewards us as these artists reach their own maturity. Here the distinction between craft for function and art are so integrated in the artist's own process as to become a meaningless distinction. The vocabulary is the functional object, the craftsmanship is particular to the medium, and yet, the aesthetic so individual as to clearly make an artistic statement that transcends the vocabulary of this traditional medium, clay. Such contributions mark a unique moment in the history of ceramics and art.

Philip Cornelius's ceramics were most recently seen at Meyer Breier Weiss, San Francisco (May 25–June 26, 1982), and he is represented by Garth Clark Gallery, Los Angeles, and Hadler/Rodriguez Galleries, New York.

Joanne Burstein is an artist and freelance writer living in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Karem *(1982), 12″ (30.5 cm) high, porcelain. Courtesy Hadler/Rodriguez Galleries, New York. Photo: Michael McTwigan.*

Tea Bowl *(1982), 4″ (10.2 cm) high, stoneware. Courtesy Hadler/Rodriguez Galleries, New York. Photo: Michael McTwigan.*



Smoking Jack Whiting *(1981), 9" (23 cm) high, porcelain. Courtesy Hadler/Rodriguez Galleries, New York. Photo: Michael McTwigan.*

Jar with Lid *(1982), 15" (38 cm) high, stoneware. Courtesy Meyer Breier Weiss, San Francisco.*

A Warning to Readers

Edward Lebow

"The problem with most art criticism of the last fifteen years is not vocabulary, but the way critics have used their words. They have conjured a kind of jargon that eludes comprehension. And in ceramic criticism, this usually results in the obfuscation of everything but the idea that a pot is a pot is a
18 *pot—like a rose is arroz is arrows. . . . Why this sudden frenzy to claim some dense meaning for cookie jars? To acquire professional accreditation, of course. Some critics believe that by skimming the froth from contemporary art jargon and applying it to clay, they can make ceramics and their own writing art-worthy."*

The mathematician Jacques Hadamard confessed he had difficulty with people who relied on words, as he did not understand "how they can be sure they are not misled by the words they use." The poet Paul Valéry similarly characterized the "first words a question utters in our mind" as "strange terms, loaded with adventitious values and associations." And Leibnitz, no slouch at this sort of thing, claimed he was troubled by his dependency on words to "acknowledge, discover or prove truth."

Modern critics have fewer misgivings, however. To overcome the vexing generality of words, we simply invent more of them. We hone one set of words to fix thoughts, as though they were bounding frogs, only to unsheath another set with even sharper theoretical points to pin down squirming notions for a more precise dissection. By narrowing the application of our tools, we assume we can achieve even more specific and accurate meanings. And on the whole, this is part of the perpetual self-sharpening that language undergoes to keep up with the growth and specialization of knowledge.

Calling for new vocabularies has become the standard way of drawing professional battle lines. Even when Susan Sontag went to war against interpretation, she couldn't resist calling in a fresh airstrike of "descriptive rather than prescriptive" terms for discussing "forms." More recently, Garth Clark wrote: "This is the challenge in ceramics today, a meaningful and precise vocabulary." Both writers were out to encourage better insight, rather than the invention of more words, but there seems to be an unwritten rule in criticism that says, if you don't like the ideas, snarl at the vocabulary.

The problem with most art criticism of the last fifteen years is not vocabulary, however, but the way critics have used their words. They have conjured a jargon that eludes comprehension. And in ceramic criticism, this usually results in the obfuscation of everything but the idea that a pot is a pot is a pot—like a rose is arroz is arrows. According to one fairly recent account, for instance, there is an artist out there who:

Engenders a species of ceramics with a clear notion of its history, yet he does not literally make a pot, a container, or a vessel. He addresses the issues of volume, containment, and surface and, in spite of himself, ends up with a vessel.

In other words, these objects are poor for spaghetti and possibly worse for succotash. Nevertheless, they depend on the same qualities of appearance as do useful pots. They contain volume. They have a surface. They are made of something tangible. And this combination of visual, material, and spatial characteristics constitutes a kind of art object. This object is somehow free of any association with other "pots" or "containers." It is an experience in itself.

The purpose of art jargon is to transform the palpable impressions of this experience into ethereal vapors. Instead of making ceramics, for example, artists "engender species" of them. To handle this funny beast of Darwinism, critics are said to combine what they write "with current and evolving critical modes"; important things to keep in mind become "delicately important." The words weave you in and spin you out and lay the hypnotic rails to wisdom like the loop-the-loop on a roller coaster, leaving no choice but to read on:

Unlike fire, its helpmate, clay has been ripped from its original primordial context aeons ago. Its overriding meaning to us—as art, as icon, as demographic statistic, as mug—must begin with its complex social functions and relationships.

Why this sudden frenzy to claim some dense meaning for cookie jars? To acquire professional accreditation, of course. Some critics believe that by skimming the froth from contemporary art jargon and applying its obscurantist language to clay, they can make ceramics and their own writing art-worthy. So they have launched a fleet of "vessels," "containers," "protean seminal conventions," and "neo-vitreous lexicons" grander than any christened by Britannia during her Imperial heyday. But this armada of redundant contortions should be a warning rather than an inspiration to readers. It exhibits confused writing (hence confused thinking) and self-infatuation rather than critical acumen. Furthermore, its abstracted idiom is a throwback to an era of art events and anorexic objects—to wit, Minimalism—whose sole survival seems to be the peculiar diction it inspired.

Initially, the invention of jargon by critics was a sign of resourcefulness. When the art objects of the late sixties and the seventies turned cheshire and, but for the grin, vanished, critics had to come up with a way of describing what was no longer visible but was still assumed to be there. What was "there" was the writer's mind. Critics no longer reported on palpable impressions, but sent word of their innermost responses to the absence of them. Essentially, the art evolved into a carefully staged Rorschach for pondering the drama of the mind observing itself.

This degree of emotional and sensory isolation might have seemed an anomaly at a time when Americans were gulping down art and firing the rest of their nerve endings with similar gusto. But it reflected the fact that art had overachieved itself right into a

corner. To fend off their own complete acceptance by both mass spirit and mass market, artists were obliged to continue on the century-old road leading to the ultimate removal of aesthetic emotion from any role in what we like to call "daily life." The sensory deprivation of cricital self-observation was the final turn. Art jargon was empowered to transform immateriality into an imposing verbal object. Critics had nothing less than a Eucharistic fervor for this transubstantiation. They believed their concoctions of language could attain the concreteness that the art suddenly lacked. Their pages porous to ink but resistant to meaning, they churned out jargon tough enough to weather every new attempt to turn an uncommon application of craft into another "multimedia" art process. Yet by surviving its reason for being, art jargon has gone from a bad habit to an addiction. And its heaviest users have reached the point where "they cannot tell you whether a thing is right or not," as Ruskin said of his dimmer colleagues, "but they can tell you whether a thing is like something else or not." This vague "something else" accounts for criticism's incessant harkening to traditions, styles, and historical sources—a magnificent, anecdotal drone that insists, although there is nothing before your eyes, it is related to things that once were. So through those now-gone things, invisibility inherits a deserving, if awkward, right to visible life.

This mystification of art through jargon is a curious inversion of the idea that the nonverbal arts defy translation into words—that "the use of words," according to the composer Roger Sessions, "is quite useless in achieving the desired artistic result." Yet it reflects the underlying theme and irony of the art of that period. It was believed that art had never been more than a mask—a document or residue—of a deeper psychological order of events. If this inner structure was, indeed, the core of artistic experience, why not find a way to encounter it firsthand—without any interference or mediation? Remove the art object and you have an art reduced to its essence. You have an event of actions and reactions—even if in concept alone—carried out over time and then, finally, committed to memory. Art became this pure performance of the mind without sensory props.

But dispensing with the object did not affect artists' urge to record what they do, if for no better reason to see how, if not what, they accomplish. In place of objects came mementos: reams of documents, facsimiles, and reproductions purporting to represent the art experience. Movies, photographs, and videotapes, notes, graphs, and grant applications became the only way of "seeing" the art. What there was to see and describe, however, meant little more than would the moving eyes under the shut lids of a dreaming man. It was evidence that something had happened, nothing more.

What began as an act of purification—meant to bring the psychological core of art closer—degenerated into a kind of art that simply increased the distance. . . . It could be experienced only through second-hand accounts. For most viewers (other than the maker and perhaps a cult of participants), the art became a generality. It was no longer a specific thing, but the idea of a thing—a generic rather than particular presence. As such, it ceased to defy words. And although words could not "achieve the desired results," the message was that nothing could. Words accompanied by reproductions were simply adequate. Art jargon especially so.

As if to prove this, the curators of the recent retrospective of Robert Smithson's art carpeted the walls with photographs, descriptions, charts, notes, and paraphernalia. Then they constructed several facsimiles of Smithson's original on-site sculptures. An odd bit of counterfeiting considering the howl the artworld let out when Nelson Rockefeller began selling his high-priced collection of copies several years ago. But these hand-me-down versions of Smithson's work are practically all there is to see of his art. Documents of his original documents, they are the counterfeits to match the counterfeit language—their purest expression and lasting remnant.

Of course, much of this reflects the way art institutions and the market itself were able to accommodate a kind of art that could be sold only in counterfeit form. So vast was the art boom, and our faith in art's reliability as an investment scheme, that the market could deal in these objectless images. A market flush enough to get real prices for fake stuff (no slur on Smithson intended) can well afford to do so without real criticism. And this may be the reason jargon lingers. The role of criticism itself was changed by the art boom. American culture no longer needed to know what was worthy. If something sold, that is all we had to know. So we supplanted discernment with omniverous delectation. The entertainment market covered the terrain like a Hoover vacuum, engorging everything in sight. We've called this "Pluralism"—a movement espousing that there's room enough in the bag for every speck of aesthetic dust.

This demotion has meant two things for criticism. If all art was equally valid, critics were left with little to do but to stamp a bland sort of inspection certificate on the art. So, like all modern endeavors stripped of utility, criticism was freed to become its own art form. Critics wrote increasingly to and for themselves. Buyers went straight to their dealers. And artists with any sense at all headed for good literature. Mimicking the artists they once had to report on coherently, critics broke into vanguard factions to smite the bastard Traditionalists. [Whose jargon now?] Since the

art itself had lost its power to curl the public's hair, these critical upstarts made bafflement the primal beat of their writing.

Bafflement is fine camouflage. Readers, particularly other critics, assume about the authors what they like to think of themselves—that their insight exceeds their ability to express it intelligibly. Anybody who grapples with ineffable complexities runs the risk of "being intelligible by concealing the core of the problem," as Dr. Einstein put it, "or else he gives an expert account . . . but in such a fashion that the untrained reader is unable to follow and becomes discouraged from reading further." Ah, but discouraging the uninitiated is a cheap thrill. Critics pressed the limits of their medium to find a way to conceal the core of the problem and simultaneously palsy the snyapses of even the trained reader. Robert Pincus-Witten has been one of art jargon's most prolific sowers:

In the recent past Post-Minimalism was occasionally referred to as "Anti-Minimalism"—a name which strikes a false note because it engenders a notion of "Maximalism" (whatever that might be) but equally because it in no way suggests the complexities of option which Minimalism rendered possible, new solutions toward which several Minimalist artists themselves evolved.[1]

But the king of the hill is Donald Kuspit:

In sum, [Francis] Bacon's painterly technique is the core of the aphoristic intuition of subjectivity he offers, for it makes the figural image abstract. Out of this abstraction, identities emerge as experimental possibilities, but none is finally true, or factually clear, although all are symbolically valid, i.e., valid as emotionally charged appearances, undisciplined releases of instinct and dissipations of the raw possibility of being alive.[2]

Rotten diction weds obtuse syllogisms to sire gibberish; this offspring sounds as precise as a physical equation, yet is as inscrutable as a mystical incantation. The overwhelming ratio of words to thoughts surpasses even Schopenhauer's grave maxim: "thoughts die the moment they are embodied by words." This is criticism's salvaged utility at work—a kind of metaphor-cum-science that swabs good and bad art alike with a coat of metaphysical and pseudomythical modifiers. Indeed, these merry stuffings of aphorisms, images, and footnotes reflect a marvelously sophisticated state of abstraction—the same sort that has led some to think catsup is a kind of vegetable.
The final irony of applying this outdated approach to ceramics and to most contemporary art, which has returned to the object with a vengeance, is that the jargon pretends the objects and the feelings they elicit are invisible and unknowable. Furthermore, its continued use assumes that the art boom is still on—that clear and perceptive criticism is unnecessary. Neither is true. "Simplicity," in Brancusi's words, "is not a goal," but the inevitable result of coming close to the "real meaning of things." In criticism, this effort begins by treating the art as the main subject, rather than as illustrations to the critic's texts, as Tom Wolfe fancies. From here it's a flat-footed leap to the realization that an art of objects requires critics to concern themselves with appearances, not disappearances. Moreover, as long as the objects remain, we can do without Minimalism's the-less-you-see-the-more-you-read syndrome of clarification.

1. Robert Pincus-Witten, "Eva Hesse: Post-Minimalism into Sublime," *Artforum,* November 1971, p. 34.
2. Donald Kuspit, "Francis Bacon: The Authority of Flesh," *Artforum,* Summer 1975, p. 59.

Edward Lebow favors Robert C. McClure: "My art is like butter; he who clarifies it removes all its substance."

Untitled *(1980-81), 22⅝" (57.5 cm) high, porcelain and stoneware. Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Allen Laughmiller.*

Adrian Saxe: An Interview

Garth Clark

Garth Clark Arguably the best point at which to begin is with what has rightly or wrongly become your leitmotif, the antelope jar. What is the significance of the antelope for you and why has it endured so long in your work?

Adrian Saxe The antelope was first used intuitively, simply in response to the need for a certain decorative distinction. Actually, the first animal I used was the ram. The Huntington Gallery commissioned me to do jardinières, with the stipulation that they be both very fine objects and that they blend unobtrusively into their environment. That is a tough commission. No artist wants his work to fade into the background—particularly a young artist seeking his signature.

So I began to do some research and found myself drawn to the use of the ram, the stag, and other animals of the hunt found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European pottery. (Although some of the best uses of these animals I found on monumental English silver of the same period.) At first I used the ram in relief, but rapidly this grew to a full figure.

Before settling on the antelope, I tried snails, salamanders, panda bears, pigs, cats, and even a pegasus, which turned out to be too cloying and cute. But finally I settled with the antelope. It worked for me, though I was not too sure why. Since then I occasionally have decided to abandon this animal, but I keep coming back to it and each time I return, its purpose becomes more clear.

It is now a crucial element in my work—a contrast that throws all other elements into high relief, making the total statement more understandable. You see that my forms are very geometric in their underlying structure. They are controlled and cerebral. The antelope is the opposite, it represents a life force. It is poised on the lid in its aerie, as if about to take flight. It is not of the world of geometry or cultural reference, it is from nature. The conventionalized quality of the pot dramatizes the naturalism of the antelope, and vice versa.

GC But it goes further than that, it creates a sense of ambivalence or at least ambiguity in terms of function.

AS Certainly, the antelope does not perform in the expected way. By changing its scale and making it very prominent, one is directed to its apparent function as a handle. Yet by making it difficult to use as a lifting device, one is denying the way in which the animal has been used in pottery before (conventionalizing the form so it *could* function as a handle). This forces a dialogue about function and its connections. One begins to think about what a handle is, what it means, and what it means to be denied this function. So one appraises the vessel's function in the manner it was intended; it is concerned with aesthetic ritual—didactic and visual—rather than utility.

GC The antelope has a history of importance in our decorative arts. It was used broadly during the Art Deco movement, along with the fountain and the ziggeraut. It was treated in metal by Edgar Brandt, in glass by René Lalique, in ceramics by John Skeaping, Jean Mayodon, Harold Staebler, and many others.

AS The antelope's fascination for us ranges from simple admiration of its beauty to the mythical roots of its symbolism. For me, it is an extraordinary device and I am less concerned with what it means than with the feelings it projects. It has delicacy and elegance combined with strength—a palpable aggression even. There is a sense of agility and, in my work I hope, a sense of arrested motion. Again this highlights a contrast: the antelope represents real time arrested, the forms represent past time assembled.

GC In your new forms, the antelope seems to be part of a system of some kind; I am referring in particular to the more complex works with base, vessel, and lid.

AS Yes, there is a hierarchical organization of forms and complexity. The bases I keep to a very primal expression. They are visibly affected by the fire, they are earthier, less finished, cracked, and sometimes include shards of previous works. There is the appearance of weathering and decomposition. Yet they are not organic. The bases represent their material source, which in turn metaphorically indicates ceramic and aesthetic foundations. The vessel, on the other hand, is a more refined, culturally determined

manifestation of the medium. Then, finally, comes the antelope again—the contrasting gesture that can be represented, but unlike the rest of the piece, cannot be controlled.

GC They are also porcelain. Is your choice of medium simply aesthetic, or is it tied to the complex and rarified history of the material?

AS Stoneware could be used as effectively in aesthetic terms, but it does not carry the rich cultural identity porcelain possesses. Stoneware does not have the same esoteric resonance.

GC Your use of a motif is of course not new in art. Yet your continued use of the antelope seems to have perplexed certain people. Perhaps they are looking for growth in the wrong place. After all, many artists have had signature devices: Philip Guston's boots and hoods, Léger's flower form, Braque's dove.

AS Another obvious example is Billy Al Bengston's iris or *Dracula* form and his earlier chevrons. They establish a personal, identifiable emblem or graphic device for "punctuating" and organizing his abstract painted fields. They seem derived purely from the craft of painting and the decorative possibilities of the materials he used. I do much the same thing with the antelope, except that it doesn't function in any graphic way, nor does it have the range of variation that Bengston's recent *Draculas* have. Not all artists use signature devices that are so readily identifiable, but we all have "constants" that we come back to time and again. We use them to organize the visual sense of our work; they are the compass points by which we navigate.

GC Let's turn now from the antelope to more general aspects of form. First, the forms of your vessels, which in some cases are influenced by very specific models, such as the Buddhist bell form.

AS As a student I was deliberately emulating bronze forms, particularly Chinese ceremonial wine vessels. I was not alone in this fascination. For hundreds of years the Chinese potters have borrowed forms and stylizations from bronze ritual vessels, which they continually adapted to their own forms. This went to and fro and created a dialogue between clay and bronze vessels that is still a powerful source of inspiration. The bronzes showed very interesting ways of dealing with conventionalized detail—the rings or the bosses on the caldrons, for example. Also, tracing the evolution of decorative and structural devices from clay to bronze and back again was very enlightening. The surface was not simply decorative, but responded to a real understanding of where that statement was derived from and what the next and logical step of development should be.

GC But what of ceramic influences?

AS From the beginning, as a student, I found it difficult to swallow the shallow Anglo-Oriental aesthetic that was predominant in the art schools. The characterization of the tea-ceremony aesthetic as being the "natural" form for clay was not convincing. The only clay that was natural to me was clay that was still inside the hill. Every step from digging it up onward was very unnatural in the organic scheme of things. I felt that a Sèvres urn was as natural as a teabowl. In fact, for me it was more natural. My roots are Western, not Asian. So when everyone else was into Zen, I turned instead to Europe, particularly eighteenth-century Europe.

I was intrigued by the complexity of decorative art in a nascent machine age: the division of labor, the duality of art and craft, the precision, and above all the overwhelming and eclectic curiosity about all kinds of visual material. The French and English porcelains interested me most because of their eccentric appearance and inventive structure and processes. Chelsea porcelains in England were among my favorites. At times they were excessive, but at their best, during the Red Anchor period, they excelled at producing mannered, innovative form with remarkable refinement. My real passion, however, is for mid-eighteenth-century Sèvres. It is ambitious and complex and, for me, it is the most satisfying technically and formally.

GC Your involvement with this period extended beyond the objects, did it not?

AS What I admired was the European impulse to collect all

Icosidodecamerous End-Cutting Bowl with Stand *(1982), 5¼" (13.3 cm) high, porcelain with raku base. Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Allen Laughmiller.*

Untitled *(1982), 8⅜" (21.3 cm) high, porcelain. Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Allen Laughmiller.*

kinds of things that were unfamiliar and very "mystical," be it a rock crystal or a Chinese celadon pot, and give it special importance by displaying it in a different context than that which it was created for—setting it in bronze mounts, ormolu, or Bombay cases, for example, so that these objects would make sense in their new environment. Something in that process of curiosity, for that is what it was, struck an answering chord. I share the urge to isolate things of visual interest and then to restructure them in a way that alters our perception of the original purpose.

GC In your discussion of pottery you seem particularly obsessed by the aspect of process.

AS Respectful of process, rather than obsessed. You see, at this stage it is easy enough to pinpoint the cultural reference in a form. And today I am cognizant of these references, their meaning and context, and I use this information deliberately. But much of my early response to form—shapes that are now seminal to my work—came simply from working with the medium. One can only learn so much by drawing or by reading a book. The greater lesson is learned in trying to physically manipulate the material. For example, one finds that a recurving slab of clay is structurally stronger than a flat one. Out of this simple discovery a new form can emerge.

As I learned to manipulate clay, I applied each new lesson to inventing "new" forms. Although these forms were made with the deliberate intent to be original, I discovered over the years that these had been achieved by potters before me. And so while some forms were innovative, others were not. None of this mattered. That I achieved certain existing destinations was not as important as the fact that I arrived at them by my own and innocent route. And so as much as my delight in the world of decorative and contemporary fine art is a major source for my art, so, too, is the lesson of process, the act of making. I don't think this is very different from the hands-on aspect of the other arts. Painters learn as much from the act of painting as from other painters. It's the same in pottery.

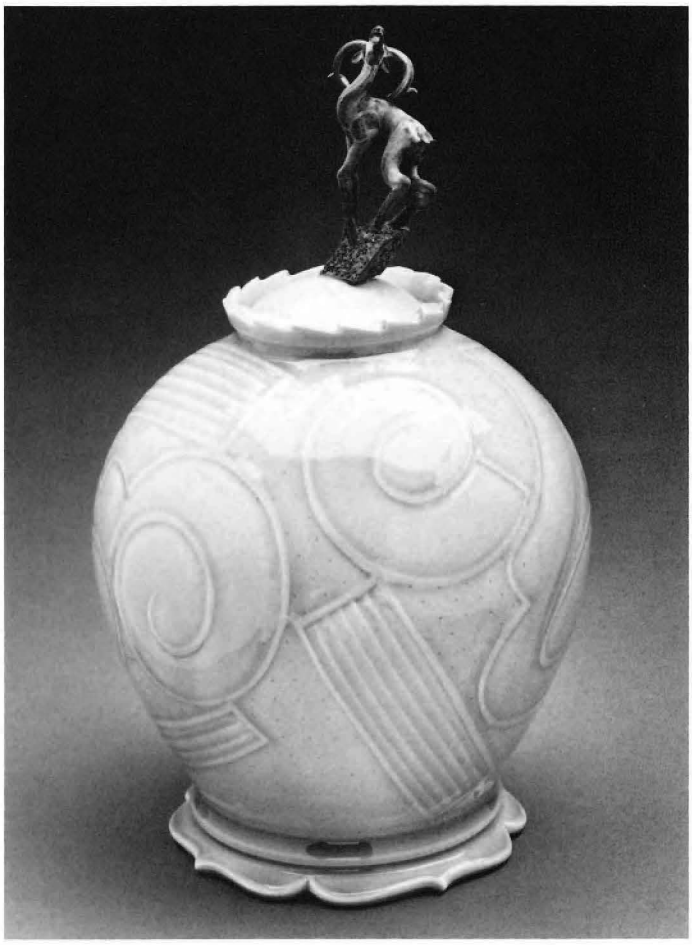
GC But technique, process, craft—call it what you will—is an emotionally charged area. Few artists have had the courage to talk about it much (and I don't mean the particulars but the generalities) because they feared stigmatization as craftsmen. Yet I hear more talk from painters about the "stuff" of painting itself as being the crucial inner source. The *act* of painting is becoming more respectable and is being examined as a vital, energizing force. It can even be a cutting edge for some artists.

AS It is partly that for me. I tend to want to do things with clay and glaze that can't be done. This is not masochism or perverseness. It just provides a different kind of edge. I have also become strongly involved with the intellectual processes of art through my friends in the field and through teaching. This is another kind of edge—more reductive and less intuitive. But if I relied solely upon this my work would become cold. So I need the balance of learning through direct experience, pushing the material, and feeding off the energy that releases. The punishment of this approach is rough when one opens the kiln and finds two months of ideas cracked, blistered, crazed, and lying in molten puddles. But I have to keep playing, experimenting, and pushing. It's part of that eighteenth-century spirit of curiosity I so admire.

GC Speaking of being on the edge, there was a time when you were on the edge aesthetically, at least by default.

AS That's true, I was one of Modernism's cast-outs. My adherence to high craft, to somewhat decadent visual language, and to the use of imagery, among other things, placed me outside the acceptable academy of Modern art. It even placed me outside the ceramic mainstream. Everyone was shoving around tons of clay, tearing holes in it, and splashing glazes on it. They thought me pretty weird and disconnected.

GC With the advent of Post-Modernism, that has changed; the decorative is back in the mainstream. You must be finding yourself dangerously close to the core of the new establishment. There is little difference in the content of some of your pieces and, say, Frank Stella's *Exotic Birds.* There is the same decadence, the



Two views of Untitled *(1979), 14" (35.6 cm) high, porcelain and stoneware. Private collection. Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Allen Laughmiller.*

Untitled *(1982), 21⅜" (54.3 cm) high, porcelain with raku base. Private collection. Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Allen Laughmiller.*

same decorative vocabulary, the same playfulness.

AS The answer, if there is one, is both yes and no. Certainly the artworld is generally more accepting of what I am doing now than ever before. But even so, I still find myself very much on the borderline. Those who read the work too literally still see only the traditional references and miss the contemporary connections that are the main theme of my work.

GC This contemporary focus seems less disguised in the new, small bowls you have been doing.

AS Yes, they are less concerned with historicism than the other work. In these pieces, I'm drawing primarily from my experience in contemporary art, and so they are less connected with specific historical/cultural plays. But even this work is not free from it entirely; the echoes of the past are still there.

GC I think it is fair to describe you as a student of decorative art. You have delved deeply into the history of the formal structures that have influenced this aspect of art, from the mysticism of the Islamic Sufi tradition to the use of the golden section, Vedic structures, and so on.

AS I have built a vocabulary of shapes, colors, forms, systems of placement, geometric order, color, and patterning and, to some extent, their symbolism. When I compose a surface I do so very much as an assemblage artist might, placing a playing card here, a strip of newspaper there. Except I work in a different vocabulary, more formalized, more conventionalized. And unlike most assemblage artists, I seek to avoid the rawness of reality, preferring to compose in camouflage, in refinement.

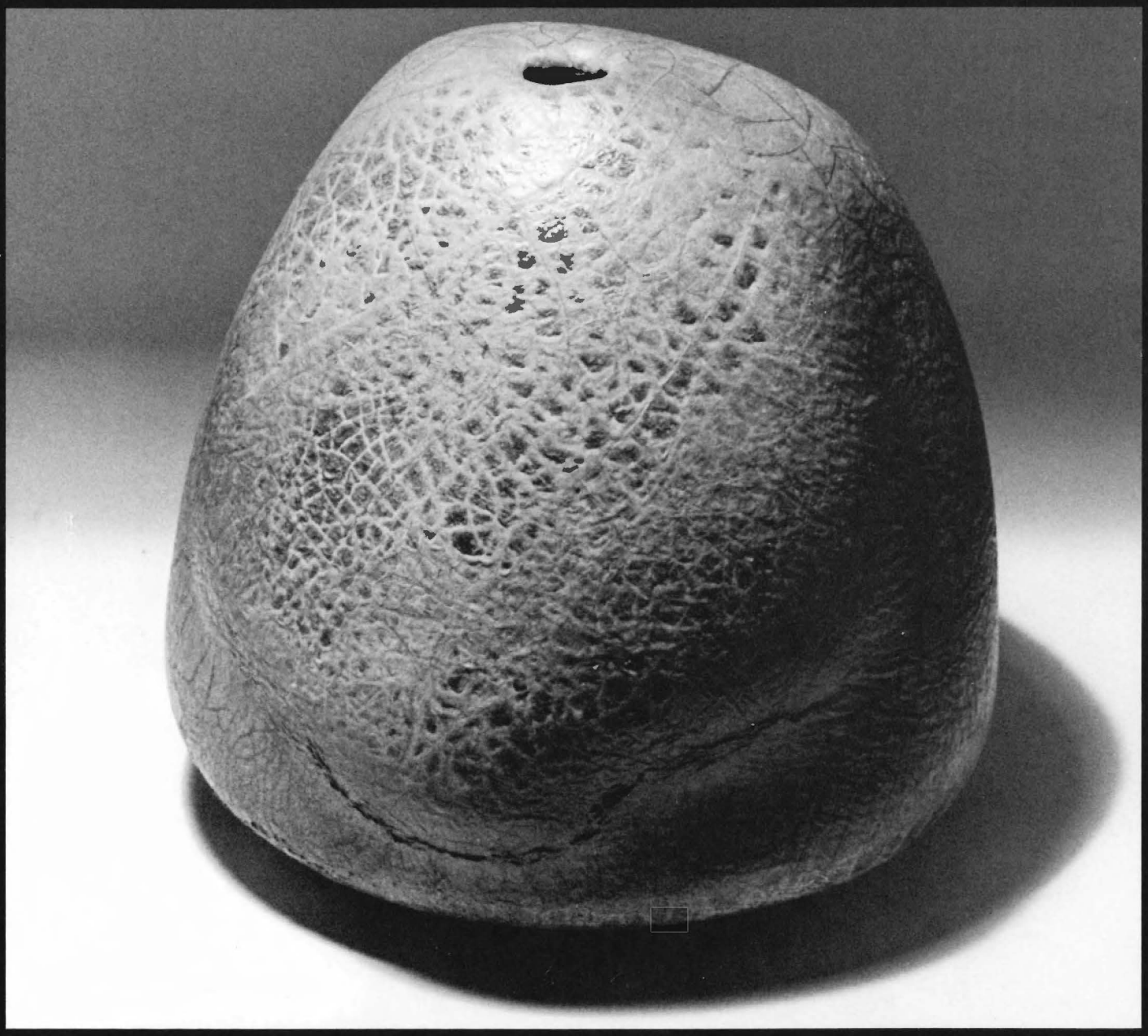
I am constantly in search of new material. At the moment, I am working with the problem of interpreting tropical fish for use in oil lamps and I'm studying the Pac-Man grid and pattern of movement as a surface device for my vessels.

GC While it may be difficult to place your work in this or that school, how do you see yourself?

AS Somewhere between Sèvres and Momoyama I suppose. I want to work to get richer, snottier, drawing from more obscure and esoteric sources, while discovering the structures to make them easily accessible. I want to push my intellectual understanding of art as far as possible without becoming academic. I want to push the process as far as possible without becoming pedantic. I want to retain the traditional format I use and yet find an avant-garde edge for it. I want to live in two contrasting worlds. It's a bit like driving with one foot on the brake, the other on the accelerator. It's a tough, urgent way to drive, but if you can afford the rubber, it's one hell of a way to move down the road.

Ceramics by Adrian Saxe will be the subject of two solo exhibitions: at Garth Clark Gallery, Los Angeles (November 13–December 4, 1982) and at The Everson Museum, Syracuse, New York (January 1983).

Los Angeles-based Garth Clark is a historian, author, and dealer in nineteenth- and twentieth-century ceramic art. His fifth book, American Potters, *was published last year by Watson-Guptill Publications.*



Harvey Goldman

Susan Montgomery

Oon-Ka *(1982), 14" (35.6 cm) high.*

Harvey Goldman in his studio.

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. A basic, irrefutable law of physics. And a strong instinct underlying the creative process of ceramist Harvey Goldman. For the past two years, Goldman has been exploring this issue of opposition and reconciliation in his earthenware vessels; as he has done so, his forms have matured from elegantly passive orbs to aggressive beings, full of vitality. His first globular wheel-thrown vessels had central openings and finely textured matt glazes in neutral or pastel colors as hypnotic and peaceful as their centered bodies. Indeed, centering and harmony were predominant themes for Goldman at the time. The vessels spoke of meditation and inwardness. The mystery of the darkened inner space—made more or less available to the viewer by larger or smaller openings—was a lovely, quiet secret, reassuring rather than unsettling, much like a seashell placed to the ear, magically revealing the sounds of the sea. The strictly controlled forms and surfaces were familiar, but anonymous. Although the vessels persistently recalled the pleasing surfaces of stones, eggs, sea urchins, and mushrooms, the precision of form, texture, and color precluded the organic quality they seemed to be seeking. This unacknowledged duality sapped the vessels of their vitality and mystery.

Goldman himself was well aware of the enervating effect of perfection and he was quick to react. Experimenting first with forms, he expanded and stretched the spheres to high domes. He doubled them up to produce rather humorous, fat-bodied "figures," not unlike fertility goddesses in their ampleness. By shifting the openings off center, curling the lips under, and denting or bulging the walls of the vessels, he contradicted the strict symmetry of the original thrown shape. A harmony of both his handbuilding and turning methods emerged.

He also reacted dramatically to the "pretty" surfaces he had been producing. Funded by a faculty research grant from Southeastern Massachusetts University (where he is an assistant professor), Goldman was able to expand his multiple-glaze technique. He developed considerable expertise in achieving apparently random effects within a largely controllable range of possibilities. Unable to totally relinquish his sense of control, yet captivated by spontaneous and autonomous chemical reactions, Goldman found a solution to his dilemma in a series of reactive glazes that predictably crackle, crawl, and flow into complex networks of color and texture. He equipped himself with a repertoire of texures that conjure up images of great age, long-term burial, or trial by fire. Glaze caked, curled, and split over the by now not-so-perfect vessels, which seem warped and battered by the same forces that produced the surfaces. Finally, the vessels have a past as well as a present and an active, discernible life of their own.

Distortion has become the essence of Goldman's process, as harmony and centering had been earlier. Unexpected and eccentric colors appear on equally eccentric forms. Overstatement and action have replaced subtlety and passivity. Pursuing this notion of surprise, Goldman has turned to color to relearn its complex system of interrelationships. Vivid yellows and reds have entered his palette, as well as acid chartreuse and bubble gum pink, often juxtaposed to one another in a contrast that teases and mocks the eye. No color is too unorthodox, or too common, for his consideration. In *Latina,* for example, Goldman uses the currently popular blue lavender range of the spectrum to his advantage.

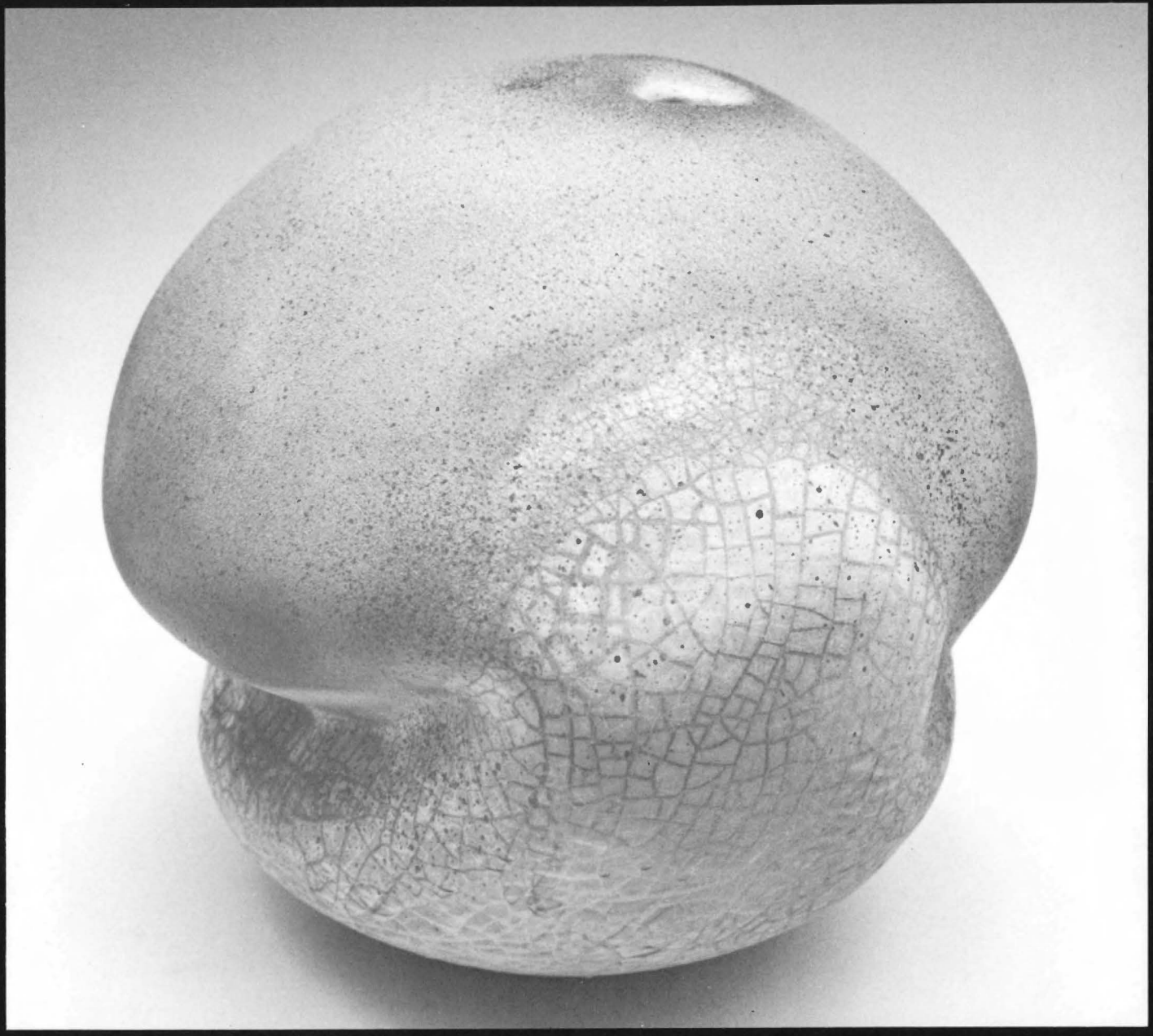
The most recent series, including *Latina,* achieves a harmony of form, texture, and color that is an outgrowth of two years concentration. The dualities are still present, but as energizing tensions rather than frustrating conflicts. Interior and exterior vie for attention. The smooth surface suddenly and unexpectedly erupts from within. What force is there inside the vessel, what creature struggling to emerge? Nothing is visible through the small opening. Yet the impact of this force radically changes the color and texture of the form, visual evidence of that physical law: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Blues stretch to lavenders, cracks widen to accommodate the growing bulge. The original, pure geometric sphere is still evident, even as it metamorphoses organically from within. Analogies to gestation and fecundity are inevitable, yet to limit interpretation of Goldman's work to solely sexual terms is simplistic. Certainly there are male and female symbols here, but obvious organic qualities are tempered by other intriguing issues. This is accomplished by allowing, even encouraging, duality to exist. Form is

at once organic and geometric in *Latina,* as opposites now act as reciprocal elements. Humor sometimes relieves the serious power of the vessels. Bazooka pink spreads in a webb of giggles over the inflated surface of *Oon-Ka,* stretching and puckering as the interior space expands unevenly. *Zin-Zang* manipulates the Chinese symbol of yin/yang—the epitome of coexisting opposites—into three-dimensional form. Glaze color and texture reinforce the sense of balanced asymmetry and reciprocal movement, constantly changing and evolving. The theme of meditation reappears in *Wooley Zuff,* but the precision and control of the earlier series has been relaxed: the "stone" has both a unique personality and a sense of eternal existence. The nearly spherical vessel balances at a slightly tipsy angle, as a fuzzy yellow ball emerges out of a gray violet cloud of crackle glaze—warm color next to cool. Opposites attract.

Like a jazz musician, Harvey Goldman uses spontaneity not from a lack of control, but through a practiced and skillful manipulation of action and reaction that comes only from experience and finely tuned instincts. Action and reaction, as a growth process, orchestrate the artist's hand, mind, and emotions. As they play together and against each other, they become the very essence of the composition, a unique improvisational performance.

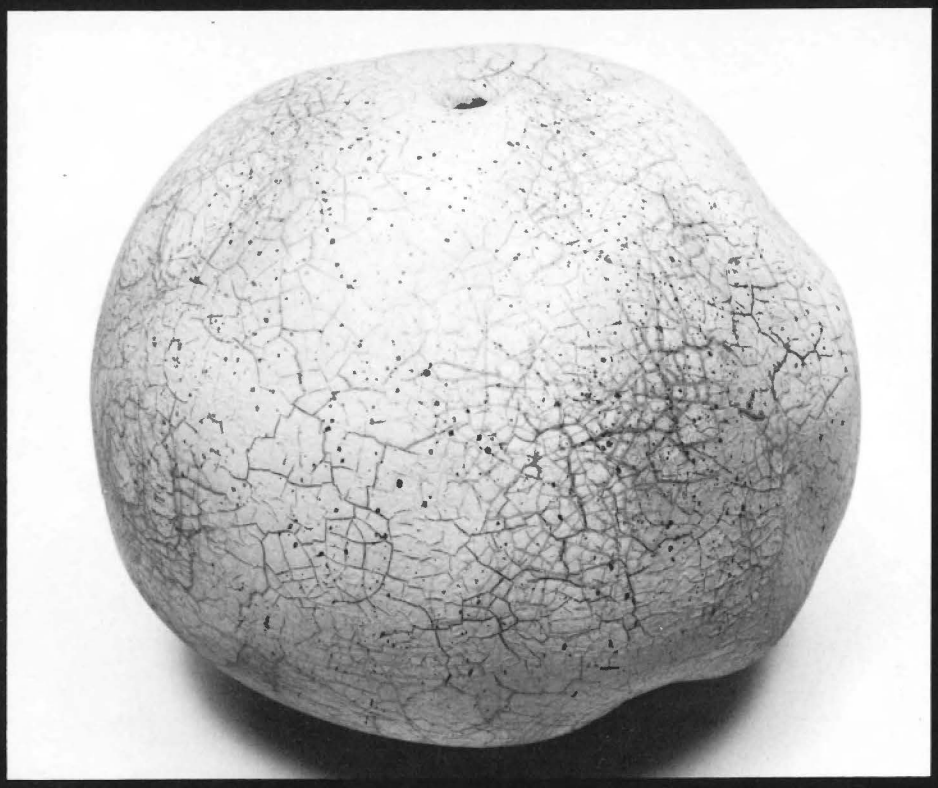
Harvey Goldman, age 31, lives in North Dartmouth, Massachusetts. Recent work will be on view at Impressions Gallery, Boston (October 6–30, 1982). All photos courtesy the gallery.

Susan Montgomery is a freelance writer living in Beverly, Massachusetts. She is pursuing a doctorate in American Studies at Boston University and recently curated a small retrospective exhibition of the work of William Wyman for the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center, Vermont.



Sashumee *(1982), 8″ (20.3 cm) high.*

Zin Zang *(1982), 13″ (33 cm) high.*



Wolley Wog *(1982), 18" (45.7 cm) high.*

Shu-Ku *(1982), 10½" (26.7 cm) high.*

Rii-Niks *(1981), 7″ (17.8 cm) high.*
Photo: Brad Guice.

Latina *(1982), 16″ (40.6 cm) high.*

Paul Soldner

Michael G. Rubin

Artistic control, a persistent concern of Western art, plays a similarly central role within American ceramics. Whether related to early handbuilt ware or to the later development of wheel-thrown pottery, the need for reproducibility, consistent quality, and appropriate function remains clearly before the ceramic artist.

But control to the Oriental potter has historically meant something different than control to the Occidental. Not until such early twentieth-century potters as Bernard Leach studied the philosophical foundations of Japanese ceramics did the Oriental approach become accessible to Americans. Of particular note is raku, a quick-firing technique that utilizes "controlled accidents," in which the pots are removed red-hot from the kiln. Begun in Japan during the latter part of the sixteenth century by Chojiro, the process allows exotic color variations, as well as a very organic clayworking experience.[1]

First developed to provide small bowls for the Japanese tea ceremony, raku required a very refractory clay body that could withstand the thermal shock of rapid cooling.

Japanese raku is intimately involved with religious and philosophical aspects of the tea ceremony and Zen. American potters have little cultural orientation toward these tenets and even as patient observers, remain distant to its many emotional subtleties. What American potters *can* experience is the organic rhythm of raku, the fluidity and spontaneity of each creative act as it blends with the next.

Paul Soldner stands as one of these American potters who has not sought to imitate Oriental raku potters, but to make his own handprint felt through the simplicity and inherent physical pleasure of what has come to be known as raku on our shore. Recently, Soldner discussed some of the differences between his early clay work and his current concerns.

An essential change is the sense of authority Soldner now feels with the clay. He uses much less clay to make the pots than before, yet their physical presence has increased. While he might have made a six-foot pot in the late fifties, today's pots are smaller, even though the scale remains dynamic. Form has become critical as well, as Soldner uses less embellishment—"if the form is strong enough, no embellishment is necessary," he states. "I am not as involved with the fire now, but more involved with the form before it goes into the kiln . . . for example, the color must support the form."[2]

Well known for his technical expertise in kiln construction and in the many methods of smoking pots during the firing, Soldner's primary concern has become "going beyond the technical." He maintains that the importance many American potters place on raku's technical process is misconceived.[3]

Fluidity as a means of control is fundamental to Paul Soldner's attitude toward working in clay. Characterized by an openness to the unpredictable nature of clay, his control is established through the relationship of each gesture, each decision, that becomes translated into physical form. The focus is not each individual movement, but the relational continuity between actions. To watch Soldner build a wall piece serves as illustration, for as he folds, tears, and presses the clay, one senses the control he commands is not expressed in the absolute nature of each step, but in the discipline of the relationship these movements have to each other.

In contrast to rationalism, with its systematic organization of thought, Soldner encourages the spontaneity of the raku experience to come forward. A creative energy develops, not in a linear sequence, but with a "circular cycle" that pulls past experience into the present. The artist's continued use of the human figure provides a recurrent theme of abstraction and dynamic visual movement, yet each instance offers a renewed experience, expanding the bounds of his sensibility.

Even the fluctuations of the kiln's fire brings a constancy, brushing across the clay, leaving its mark as water would, flowing over rocks in a stream. There is what he calls a "predictableness of the uncontrolled in the fire."[4] At the center of this notion is the potter's reluctance to over-finish the pot, preferring instead to allow the kiln's fire to complete the process. Differing from the control required for production ware, this method relies on the singularity of each firing. We might think of Soldner's view of the creative process as asymmetrical. The vessel's irregularity, its personal reality, calls for an immediate and fresh response.

The use of the potter's wheel has been central to Soldner's work. During the late fifties, he developed a method of throwing large pots, which he called "extended throwing," by adding thick coils of clay to the top of the cylinder's wall. "I once threw clay up to eight feet, with the wall no thicker than one inch at the base," recalls Soldner. "However, this is only a technique and of use only as a means to expressing new ideas in clay."[5]

While he still uses the wheel to obtain the basic form of his moderate-size vessels, the present containers are comparably smaller, with walls that ripple and bulge. He then shapes the pots by hand, paddling the wall or attaching additional slabs of clay. Frequently, patterns are impressed into their surfaces using found objects—perhaps the tread of a canvas shoe or the grid of a wire screen. A dialogue is thus established between the curvilinear pot and the angular, often jagged edges of the overall assembled form. In addition is the textural tension between the smooth surface of the thrown walls against the grainy, torn edges of the rims.

(Preceding page) Clay Vessel *(1982), 18″ (45.7 cm) high. Courtesy Objects Gallery, San Antonio. Photo: J.A. McKinnis.*

Clay Vessel *(1982), 12″ (30.5 cm) high. Courtesy Objects Gallery, San Antonio. Photo: J.A. McKinnis.*

Wall Piece *(1982), 12″ x 22″ (30.5 x 55.9 cm). Photo: Michael G. Rubin.*

Color—in the form of slips, oxide stains, and salts—ranges from the reds and greens of iron and copper oxides to dense charcoal. Slips are poured or brushed on to form freely composed lines that curve and drip as gravity pulls the liquid downward. Bold quick strokes overlap in a tangle of calligraphic markings.

The human figure is used as a kind of personal narrative, the images cut out of magazines and applied to the clay surface as a stencil. Often appearing as negative shapes surrounded by stain, these diagrammatic figures express a rhythmic celebration of the human body and, through the use of ready-made images, tap the pictorial content of printed media in our culture.

Further removed from pottery are Soldner's wall pieces, which function as abstract relief compositions. Made as cylinders on the potter's wheel and then crushed into exploded form, the edges project in strong directional patterns. Impressed shapes are positioned to reinforce the basic three-dimensional character of the piece. Here again, stenciled figures may be employed as they are on the vessels. Resembling fragments of a larger wall mural or even shards of discarded pottery, these wall pieces activate the surrounding space so that the viewer is engaged in imagining these unseen possibilities.

It is Soldner's unique inventiveness in his use of raku that brings singular value to the work. Although Japanese raku is his reference point, particularly in his attitude toward clay as an expressive medium, it "is related to the Japanese tradition only vaguely," as Soldner once remarked. "It has become an American technique, for which we have no correct name."[6]

Through raku, Paul Soldner makes physical his own artistic beliefs. In the spirit of raku is the necessity to embrace the element of surprise. There can be no fear of losing what was once planned and there must be an urge to grow along with the discovery of the unknown. Raku offers us deep understanding of those qualities in pottery which are of a more spiritual nature, of pots by men willing to create objects that have meaning as well as function.[7] In turn, Soldner's creative process is hallmarked by a sense of control that remains open ended, ready to change, ready "to gamble on your own intuition." Critical to his orientation as well are learning experiences shared with other American clay artists. When Soldner went to the Los Angeles County Art Institute (then the Otis Art Institute) in 1954, he was one of the first to study with Peter Voulkos and one of the few to continue producing pottery as a functional object (or for "utilitarian purposes," as Soldner prefers to describe it). He recalls first walking into Otis "to find an empty room with only a sink and table, without kiln or shelves."[8] Voulkos was still making traditional pottery, but the atmosphere was changing rapidly. Through the influence of the European ceramic work of Picasso, Miró, Leger, and others, more radical approaches began to be explored.[9]

This aggressive stance, felt by Soldner, Ken Price, John Mason, Henry Takemoto, and others studying at Otis then, is exemplified in this statement by Mason made in the fifties: "Timidity of spirit, coupled with little real conviction, has resulted in a ceramic form synonymous with hobbyists, dilettantes, and three-dimensional cartoonists."[10] By first questioning all phases of the ceramic process, Soldner continues his inquiries in his own art and teaching. To question, to accept uncertainty as a force within the creative act, these are basic realities for the artist. In contrast to the refinements of technology or the improved efficiencies of predictability, Paul Soldner employs a fluid sense of control guided by intuition and disciplined by experience. His pottery gives physical meaning to a vision that is not so much a statement of fact as it is the disclosure of a personal rhythm, binding each of his creations within the boundaries of the artist's hand.

1. Christopher Tyler and Richard Hirsch, *Raku* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1975), and Frank Hamer, *The Potter's Dictionary of Materials and Techniques* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1975), pp. 241-44.
2. Interview with Paul Soldner conducted by the author, May 1982.
3. Ibid.
4. Comments made by Paul Soldner during a workshop at Craft Alliance Gallery, St. Louis, May 1982.
5. "Ceramics: Double Issue," *Design Quarterly* nos. 42-43 (1958), p. 62.
6. Lee Nordness, *Objects: USA* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), p. 76.
7. Garth Clark, *A Century of Ceramics in the United States, 1878-1978* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), p. 330.
8. Interview with Paul Soldner conducted by the author, July 1981.
9. Clark, *A Century of Ceramics,* p. 133.
10. "Ceramics: Double Issue," p. 59.

The work of Paul Soldner may be seen at Craft Alliance Gallery, St. Louis; The Elements, New York; Objects Gallery, San Antonio; Thomas Segal Gallery, Boston.

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The Early Literature of Ceramics

Ruth Irwin Weidner

Although the history of American ceramics stretches back to the early years of colonization, little was written about the activities of our potters until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Not until after the 1876 Centennial Exhibition did the proliferation of literature about this country's pottery and porcelain appear. At that time a new enthusiasm for the clayworking arts seems to have been paralleled by an avid desire to *describe* the burgeoning ceramic activity of the 1870s and 1880s.

A study of the literature of these two decades makes it patently clear that the eminent Edwin AtLee Barber (whose monumental contributions will be discussed in a subsequent article) was by no means the first American ceramic historian. Because women were the chief protagonists in the widespread and influential china-painting movement, it seems fitting that the title "First Major Historian of American Ceramics" should go to a member of the feminine sex. In 1878, Jennie J. Young produced a hefty volume, *The Ceramic Art: A Compendium of the History and Manufacture of Pottery and Porcelain.*[1] The final chapter of this world history is entitled "United States." In her forty-five-page discussion, Young comments upon the work of the principal potteries of the time: James Carr, Etruria Pottery Company (Ott & Brewer), Chelsea Keramic Art Works, and Greenpoint Porcelain Works, to name a few. Here can be found illustrations of Isaac Broome's *Baseball Vase, Cleopatra,* and *Pastoral Vase,* large objects which he modeled while associated with Ott & Brewer, and of Karl Müller's *Century Vase, Keramos Vase,* and *Poet's Pitcher,* all done at Greenpoint, New York. Jennie Young has unerringly included all those works which are today considered principal monuments. Moreover, her chapter abounds with mention of lesser-known potteries, with which she seems to have been thoroughly familiar (albeit one notices minor spelling errors). Young published a related (but unillustrated, and thus of lesser value) article in *Atlantic Monthly* in the following year.

Apparently drawing her figures from the 1870 census, Young estimated that in the 1870s there were 777 pottery establishments in the United States, including twelve at Cincinnati, forty-six at East Liverpool, and fifty-seven at Trenton. What about this industry in Trenton, where the activity was apparently greatest? For present-day historians (particularly those interested in factory-produced wares) the following article is essential: F.E. Fryatt's "Pottery in the United States," first published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in February 1881 and republished in abridged format both in *Crockery and Glass Journal* in December 1900 and in *Hobbies* in February 1949.[2] Although the unillustrated *Hobbies* abridgement may be somewhat more accessible to contemporary readers than the original *Harper's* publication, the latter is well worth seeking. Miss Fryatt has written what today may be recognized as the single most vivid description of pottery manufacture in Trenton, New Jersey, in the period circa 1880. Beginning with an account of her arrival by train to this "Staffordshire of America," she introduces us to the entire process of pottery making in the then well-developed factory system —from the first glimpse of the "ruddy flame-crowned cones" of the kilns to the drawing of the kilns and revealing of the final product. We see the slip room, workers throwing and turning, the batter, the molding room, and the glaze room, and learn in turn of the various processes of manufacture.

But the Fryatt article is not wholly devoted to Trenton products, for the author chose to illustrate several pieces of

Group of ceramics by members of the Cincinnati Pottery Club (1880). The shapes are simple and traditional, the decoration complex. Original photograph by J. Landy, engraved for Harper's Weekly, *May 29, 1980. Courtesy Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum Library.*

Vases decorated by Maria Longworth Nichols, founder of Rookwood Pottery. Illustration from Harper's New Monthly Magazine, *May 1881.*

dinnerware from the Haviland set designed for President Rutherford B. Hayes by American artist Theodore Davis. This set, produced in Limoges, France, was considered important then, as it is today, because it was designed by an American from subjects drawn from the flora and fauna of our own country.

Of the pottery companies operating in New England in these early years, one of the most outstanding was the Low Art Tile Works of Chelsea, Massachusetts. In *Century Magazine* for April 1882,[3] Frank D. Millet discussed some of the processes and experiments of John Gardner Low, and summed up the frustrations of Low's early trials with clay: "The history of these months of experiment counts few or no bright days."[4] In this early literature, it is often brief mentions that provide important research clues or fascinating facts that otherwise might have been lost. From Millet's article, for example, we learn the American sculptor William Rimmer provided sympathy and encouragement to J.G. Low while the latter struggled with experiments and marketing problems. In addition to a step-by-step description of production methods at the Low works, there are seven illustrations of important early products, including designs by Theodore Baur and Arthur Osborne. Millet concluded his article:

New kilns have been built at Chelsea, and a monster press has been set up. The discouraging condition of experimental production are no longer in the path of progress, and the expense of the costly first steps has been met. The results are before the public, and form one of the most significant features of the present artistic movement in the United States.[5]

These words convey a sense of American pride in the rapidly expanding ceramic industry of 100 years ago. Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of the early literature is its emphasis on the concepts of "American" and "manufacture." As nineteenth-century pottery companies struggled with factory operations, new sophisticated equipment, problems of tariffs and labor, and dilemmas of advertising and nationwide marketing, artistic concerns were sometimes of secondary importance. This is one reason why designers of this period borrowed so liberally from British and European design sources.

It is generally recognized that Cincinnati, Ohio, was an important early center for the American Art Pottery movement. Here there was, from the beginning, a conscious struggle to conquer new ceramic processes while retaining artistic integrity. It was in this city, in 1878, that George Ward Nichols compiled a small but important manual, *Pottery: How It Is Made, Its Shape and Decoration.* In Nichols's words,

It is the object of this Book to show that the manufacture of Pottery may become one of the great art industries in the United States; to describe the laws which govern the form and decoration of Pottery; and to give practical instruction in the art of painting, either with vitrifiable or common oil colors, upon hard or soft porcelain, or upon earthenware.[6]

The author discusses laws of proportion, unity of form and decoration, and such practical considerations as the correct positioning of handles for jugs and other vessels. A highlight is six pages of Japanese decorations by Nichols's wife, Maria Longworth Nichols (later Storer). As founder of Rookwood Pottery, she is a central figure in the history of American art wares. (Considering Rookwood's eventual success with landscape motifs, it is amusing to note that G.W. Nichols

Two pieces from the White House porcelain service designed by Theodore R. Davis for President Hayes. Illustrations from Harper's New Monthly Magazine. *February 1881. Courtesy Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum Library.*

admonishes against landscape painting as decoration for ceramics.)

Two important articles that discuss early art pottery developments in Cincinnati are Mrs. Aaron F. Perry's "Decorative Pottery of Cincinnati," from *Harper's* of May 1881,[7] and an anonymous article, "Cincinnati Art Pottery," from *Harper's Weekly* of May 29, 1880.[8] The former article provides a lengthy and well-illustrated description of some midwest harbingers of the American Art Pottery movement, beginning with Benn Pitman's 1874 summer class for ladies at the Cincinnati School of Design and the subsequent preparation of decorated wares exhibited at Philadelphia in 1876. The account is given in sufficient detail to enrich the knowledge of the ceramic historian, and the enthusiastic contemporary viewpoint is valuable. There are nineteen illustrations, including works by Laura Fry, M. Louise McLaughlin, Adelaide Nourse, Agnes Pitman, and Maria Longworth Nichols.

The *Harper's Weekly* article is brief but colorful, a notice of a reception and exhibition by the Cincinnati Pottery Club, whose members were also discussed in the article cited above. The reporter interjects one personal opinion into an otherwise crisp and businesslike account:

There are scores of women in Cincinnati belonging to the "idle rich" class who spend most of their time in the potteries. It is to be feared that this occupation is often at the expense of what are called "social duties," but there can be no doubt of the fact that they are by it much healthier in mind and body. Handling dear old mother earth, whether it be digging potatoes or making pots and plaques, does not leave much room for hysteria.[9]

This article provides us with a single illustration, which shows pieces exhibited by the Pottery Club.

A salient characteristic unites the viewpoints of all of these authors of 1878 to 1882: Each conveys a sense of early American accomplishments as an exciting prelude to forthcoming triumphs. We know now, from our vantage point of 100 years hence, that the authors' visions of future success were valid. For just over the horizon, as the 1870s gave way to the 1880s, was the magnificent success of the Art Pottery movement, led by the vitality of such firms as Rookwood, and the later accomplishments of the American dinnerware industry as exemplified by the hard-won prowess of Walter Scott Lenox. From tentative but persistent and enthusiastic beginnings, well documented in the literature, American ceramics emerged a century ago as an important new art form. In the light of the clay renaissance of the present time, the story of this creative renewal seems doubly prophetic.

1. Jennie J. Young, "United States," *The Ceramic Art: A Compendium of the History and Manufacture of Pottery and Porcelain* (New York: Harper, 1878), pp. 442-487. See also her "The Ceramic Art in America," *Atlantic Monthly* 44 (November 1879), pp. 558-598.
2. F.E. Fryatt, "Pottery in the United States," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 62 (February 1881), pp. 357-369. Republished in abridged format in *Crockery and Glass Journal* 52 (December 13, 1900), and, unillustrated, in *Hobbies* 53 (February 1949).
3. Frank D. Millet, "Some American Tiles," *The Century Magazine* 23 (April 1882), pp. 896-904.
4. Ibid., p. 897.
5. Ibid., p. 904.
6. George Ward Nichols, *Pottery: How It Is Made, Its Shape and Decoration* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1878), p. iii.
7. (Mrs.) Aaron F. Perry, "Decorative Pottery of Cincinnati," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 62 (May 1881), pp. 834-845.
8. "Cincinnati Art Pottery," *Harper's Weekly* 24 (May 29, 1880), pp. 341-342.
9. Ibid., p. 342.

Ruth Irwin Weidner is librarian and associate professor at West Chester State College, Pennsylvania, where she specializes in the arts of nineteenth-century America. Her book, American Ceramics Before 1930: A Bibliography, *has just been published by Greenwood Press.*

Exhibitions

Totemic Forms *(1982), 66" (167.6 cm) high, stoneware, porcelain, slate, marble, stone. Courtesy Exhibit A, Chicago. Photo: Brian Oglesby.*

Tony Hepburn

Janet Koplos

It is dismaying to value Tony Hepburn's intelligence, his analysis, his teaching, and yet be so unmoved by his work.

His recent *Totemic Forms* are faintly suggestive of figures, roughly human in height and each having a flaring, bowllike top that might allude to a head. But there is nothing organic about their character. They consist of a stacked assortment of clay and stone materials. From a thin, irregular plinth rises a tapering base with four or more sides, succeeded by a narrower, straighter shaft. Then comes an accordian neck composed of turned circular rings of white unglazed clay, and finally the bowl/head, which may be spiraled, terraced, or smooth on the exterior and is frequently lidded in some way, concealing any content.

The clearest aesthetic focus is the mix of materials, from literal stones to stoneware, and including as plinths what appear to be recycled marble lavatory stalls. This mix does not convey the sensuousness of materials. Surfaces are imperfect but hard. And although the hardness is not one of cold, slick machine production, it is equally distant from the sensitivity of a hand in direct contact with the material. There is no signature in the manipulation. Rather, one is conscious of tools, of the artist working at a remove. That remove is maintained in the objects' lack of emotional character, and their lack of sculptural presence despite the figural allusion.

Although they are unquestionably three dimensional, occupying space and conceived in the round, there is no satisfying viewpoint. I feel as if I'm forever looking at the back, and that movement to another viewpoint would reveal coherence or culmination. Instead, movement reveals only another restrained, blank face. These objects seem to exist only as an assemblage of parts, each of which can be observed or examined, but there is no synthesis, no crescendo. They don't add up to a whole.

An understanding of them as sculpture is also made difficult by the fact that they don't interact with the space around them. Extension in space is restricted; they are closed, self-contained. Nor do they have enough visual weight to suggest they are solid, massive hunks of clay. One gets a sense of their being hollow, though Hepburn does not seem interested in interior volume. The hollowness is equivalent to that of a streetlight. Indeed, the coloration—dark rising elements and white neck and head—would appear to refer to an old-fashioned streetlight or a floor lamp. This idea is not exploited either, however. The "lamp" does not illuminate the space around it, but has the deadening impassiveness of a switched-off lamp in a dim room.

A kind of consistency runs through all of those things about Hepburn's work which discomfit me. First is the dispassionate control reflected in the nonemotional character of the work and the nonspontaneous assembly. (Contrast the mood of this work to the found-object assemblages of Rauschenberg, for example.) There *is* one object here that breaks with Hepburn's otherwise deadpan mood. In that piece, the bowl/head is made of several rough slate segments, without any lid. Within this cone shape is something (a stone?) wrapped in raw canvas and dashed with glue that discolors and glosses it. The raw irregularity of the slabs gives a sense of movement and change, as if all the elements had randomly slid into this configuration. This seems related to natural occurrences, and the wrapped object inside is mysterious and moody. Of course this emotional effect is at odds with the artificial rhythm of the chalky, turned neck.

As consistent is the sustained avoidance of category and expectation. Hepburn's objects might be summarized as Neither-Nor. Add it up: figural but not organic; varied materials neither sensuous nor tactile; neither machine precision nor the subtlety of handforming; three dimensional but not interacting with space; neither massive nor volumetric; totemic yet not emotional; and so forth. Perhaps this consistent inconsistency is precisely what Hepburn wants.

If the contrasts were aggressive, the tension could produce a moving intensity. Unfortunately, I do not find that. Instead the Neither-Nor character makes these objects seem ambivalent, noncommittal, anonymous, static. The overtness of piecing and assembly (such as shims where parts don't match) makes it clear that process is important to the artist. Hepburn has previously indicated that abstractness, geometry, marking, placement, and other such formal factors were important to his work. Yet they also figure in mathematical exericses. What makes it art? The artist's experience can be primary, but it must be communicable. (Viewer's response may be a definitional requirement for art.) These clay forms, for all their seriousness, seem to me to fall short in that respect.

Hepburn also shows drawings executed not in preparation for the clay works, but rather subsequent to them, in response to them. The charcoal medium unifies the objects, and in the drawings Hepburn exaggerates the constriction and expansion of the forms. The blackness of charcoal gives the objects more visual weight, emphasizes the shadows and mystery, and suggests a power and a threat entirely absent from the actual objects. The smudges on the drawings augment the darkly radiant presence. How curious that the drawings do what the objects don't, and are for me a much more satisfying aesthetic experience.

Tony Hepburn's Totemic Forms *were seen at Exhibit A Gallery, Chicago (May 7-June 11, 1982).*

Janet Koplos is crafts editor for The New Art Examiner.

Bruria

Mac McCloud

I have never been overly thrilled by cast-plaster face masks. I see them often since they are a popular assignment in sculpture or recreation classes. As "memorial" casts, they have, no doubt, been sighed at, wept over, pondered. How many have mooned over the terminal impressions of the long-departed Beethoven, Mozart, Baudelaire? With their brooding Romantic flair, they undoubtedly fascinate a certain number of viewers, much as a three-dimensional mirror of the human physiognomy might. To this observer, given their inevitable air of antique souvenir, they have always appeared constricted, mute, closed, compressed into acquiescent dormancy—qualities I do not find overtly moving. They are used occasionally by artists in their works and in some cases the exception may prove the rule. The artist Bruria has, in her most recent showings, combined casts of heads and faces in fired porcelain, which were then glazed or painted colorfully in her development of groups of symbolic relationships.

In her exhibition at Jacqueline Anhalt Gallery, Bruria has carried her casting techniques a large step forward. She has cast a life-size figure of an adolescent youth (her teen-age son) in plaster, had an enormous slip mold commercially prepared, and the entire piece has been poured in slip and fired to bisque temperature. Although the exhibition is centered entirely around this single large-scale statue, without color or glaze and balanced precariously upon a small pedestal in the middle of the gallery, the intent of the display is primarily pedagogical. Our attention is meant to be placed on the many photographs which line the walls of the gallery and which depict, step-by-step, the details of the entire process of casting this large figure.

We were provided the information that the giant slip mold weighed in cold at half a ton. Two hundred pounds of liquid porcelain slip were required to fill it for one pour. Naturally, there were spills and unavoidable accidents. The mold itself had to be handled with a fork lift or winched into place. Moreover, the figure, no matter how supine the posture, turned out to be too complex for a single two-piece slip mold: hands had to be cast in separate sections and attached afterwards.

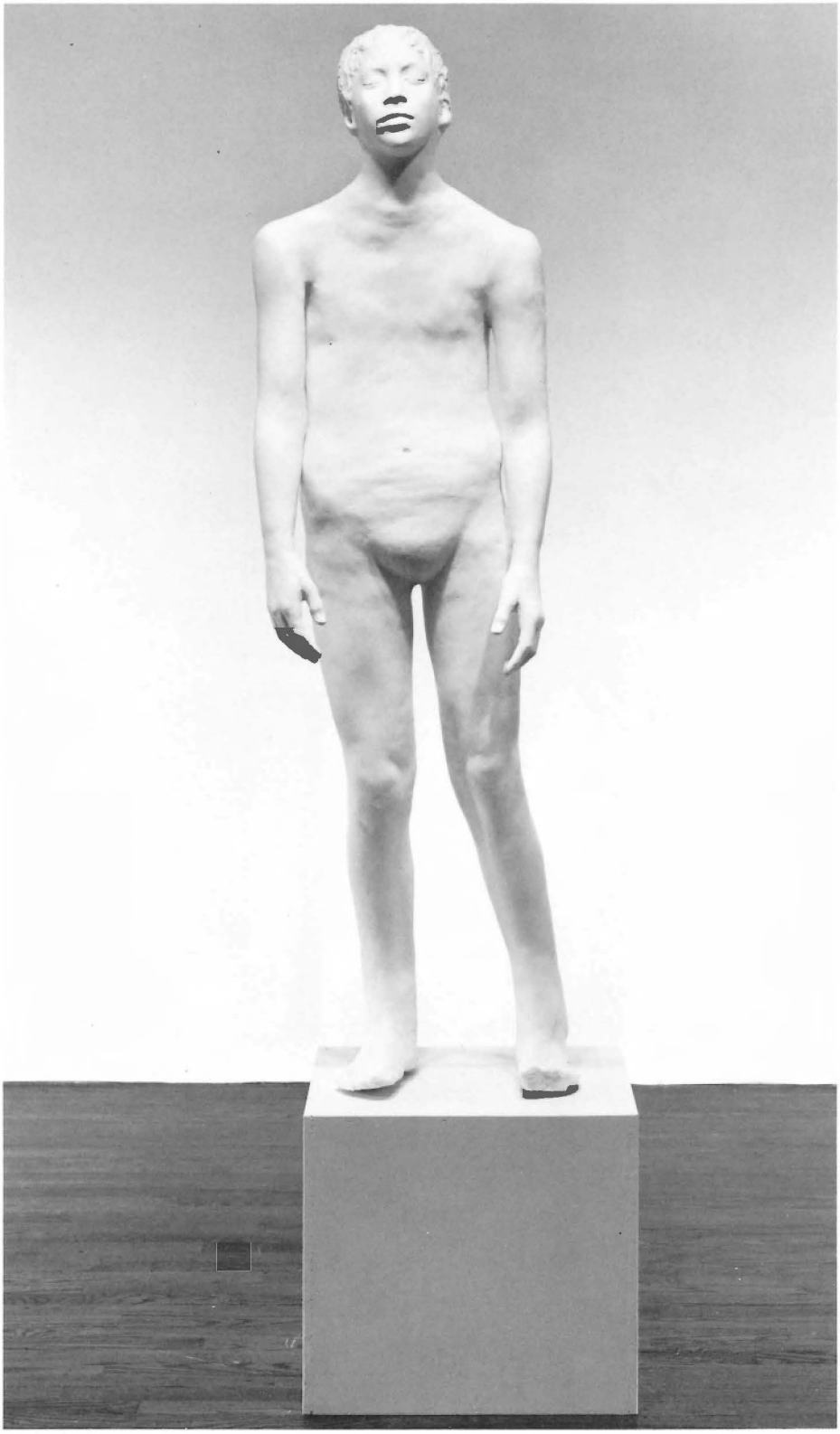
The technical achievement, although challenging, especially given the nonindustrial facility in which the work had to be performed, presented formidable difficulties, both physically and financially. The question to be raised is still, was it worth it? Bruria's special skills, resources, and experience allowed her to carry the project through to completion and, indeed, she can make the claim that this is the largest human figure ever cast and fired in porcelain. Stark as it is, standing alone, surrounded by its walls of surrounding documents, the figure presents an air of being merely one more step in an on-going procedure. There is something "incomplete" about this presentation, a lack of finish, almost as if it were pausing. The model stands awkwardly erect, vertically passive, chest squeezed almost flat with adolescence and the weight of the seizing plaster mold, an unmoving, silent participant in its own incipient immortality, genitals swathed into oblivion in an oddly shaped wad of swaddling. Unglazed fired porcelain displays that neutral, pallid, whitish gray color that can easily be mistaken for casting plaster. A suggestive reference to the work of George Segal by a quizzical gallery visitor was turned aside by Bruria's observation that her casting techniques were far more precise, hence intimate in their results, than were Segal's.

In consideration of her heretofore intense and prolonged concerns with color and with the relations among her figures, one may logically expect the reappearance and further development of this figure in Bruria's future work. As presented, it marks the beginning core of her matured aesthetic, and my initial impression was that the work had been forced prematurely into an exhibition format. Although it might represent a considerable technical accomplishment, it needs further sensitive contemplation and response by the artist to achieve the definitive expression of her previous statements.

Or will it be permitted to remain a pale, muted, and oddly askew figure standing like a refined, obedient, strangely disembodied presence before the questioning observer?

This work was exhibited at Jacqueline Anhalt Gallery, Los Angeles (April 11-May 7, 1982).

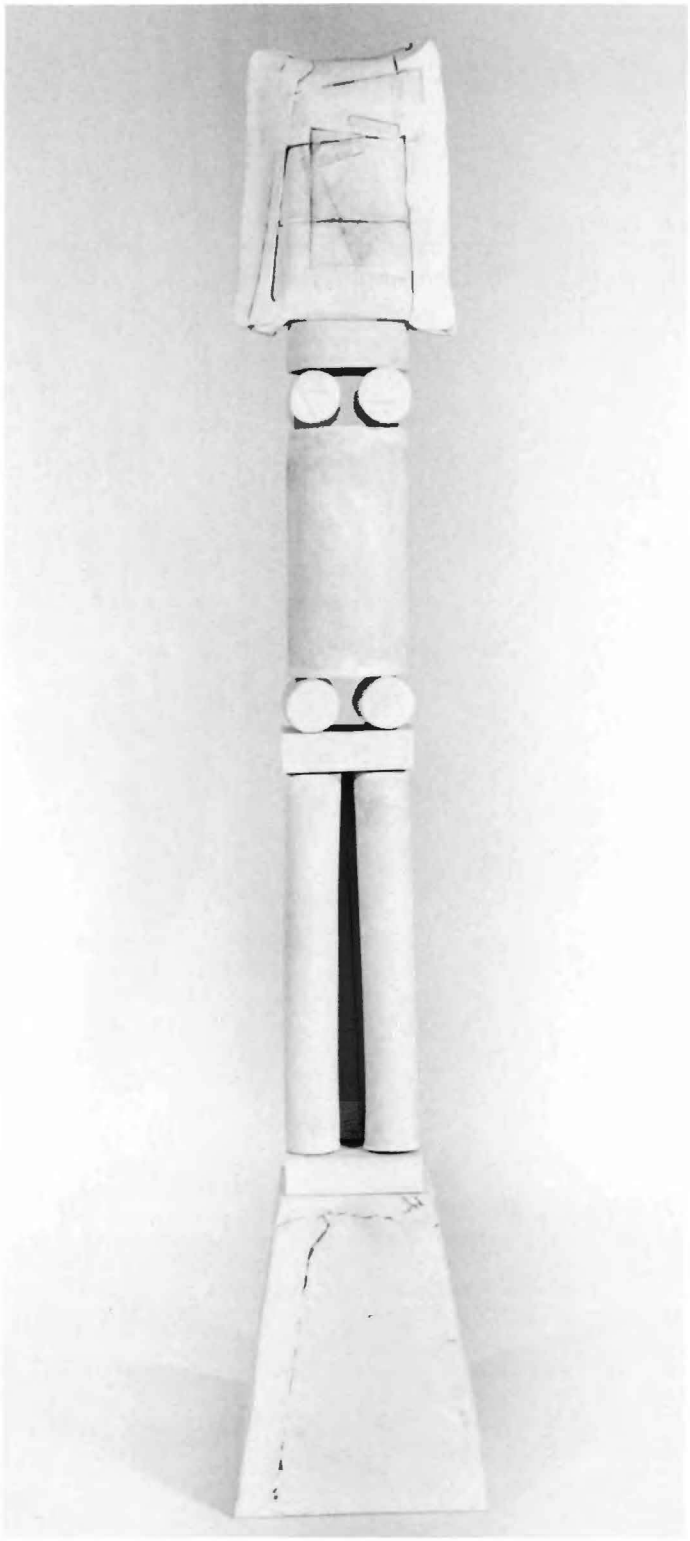
Mac McCloud is the pen name of Malcolm McClain, artist, teacher, and frequent writer of art reviews. For the past sixteen years he has taught ceramics and sculpture at California State University, Los Angeles.



Edge of Change, *60" (152.4 cm) high, porcelain. Courtesy Jacqueline Anhalt Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Douglas Parker.*

Twister *(1981–82), 63″ (160 cm) high. Courtesy Cooper/Lynn Gallery, New York.*

Column/Blue Man *(1981), 75″ (190.5 cm) high. Private collection. Courtesy Cooper/Lynn Gallery, New York.*



Carl Culbreth

Donna Harkavy

Carl Culbreth's latest clay work breaks down the boundaries between sculpture and architecture. Although primitive architectural forms have strongly influenced his previous work, they have never been as prevalent as in the present work. In some cases, these sculptures are specifically architectural, as in *One Section of an Unbuilt Larger Structure* (1982), which is based on the architectural organization of a post and lintel system. Moreover, this work combines Culbreth's primary medium, clay, with a common building material, wood, that reinforces the architectural dimension. At other times, the sculptures are more allusively architectural, incorporating such forms as columns and pyramids. What makes this shift to a more architectural style all the more interesting is that Culbreth's sculpture still retains some of the anthropomorphic elements of his earlier work, demonstrating a logical progression in the evolution of his oeuvres.

An exhibit of Culbreth's work evokes a timeless environment: While the sculptures have a solid presence in the here and now, they also recall primitive forms from an unspecified past. Beginning in 1978, Culbreth, in a radical departure from his earlier wall pieces, began experimenting with vertical structures composed of alternating, squat, vertical columns and thinner, horizontal cylinders, surmounted by a pillow shape. As these works developed, the vertical columns became thinner, and at times were divided into two separate columns. Culbreth added pedestals as well as rectangular dividing units. The result was tall, free-standing sculptures, both anthropomorphic and totemic. These elongated columns suggest similarities to the human figure; they can be perceived as legs and torsos, and the pillow shapes can be read as heads. While many of Culbreth's sculptures are not as patently humanoid as *Column/Blue Man* (1981), which he calls his self-portrait, they are nevertheless anthropomorphic in their vocabulary of forms, in their scale—usually "life-size"—and in the relation of the individual parts to one another.

The roundness of the forms coupled with their monumental presence suggest totems. Indeed, totemic and other megalithic primitive structures such as dolmens, menhirs, and taulas, to name a few, are the most important source of imagery, form, and texture throughout Culbreth's work since 1978. Drawn to these atavistic shapes and often titling his sculptures after them, Culbreth adapts primitive forms all the more provocatively when he transforms them into a modern idiom. The rough-hewn, mammoth stone structures that are his sources are modified and pared down to slender vertical structures of pure line that at times recall the work of Constantin Brancusi.

Other parallels emerge between Culbreth's clay sculpture and the work of Brancusi. Both Brancusi and Culbreth have great respect for their materials and both use the intrinsic qualities of their materials to enhance their sculpture. In Culbreth's work, the clay becomes a permanent visual record of the artist's process. For example, Culbreth often rolls out slabs of clay on a piece of canvas. Instead of smoothing away the texture of the canvas, he allows its imprint and other textures to remain in the clay. Similarly, he leaves the scratch marks where the clay is joined, and at times even emphasizes these areas with color highlights.

Like Brancusi, Culbreth uses a limited number of shapes to their maximum potential. By varying the organization of the basic shapes that are the building blocks of his sculpture, Culbreth continually arrives at new solutions. The process of constructing the component parts and exploring their relationships is an important element of his work.

The role of the pedestal has concerned Culbreth over the last few years: In the earliest vertical sculptures, he dispensed with the base altogether, allowing the columns to stand directly on the floor. Since then, and with greater assurance, he has used different forms as bases, such as truncated pyramids and rectangular blocks. In his most recent work, the most architectural to date, the pedestal has become wholly integrated—shapes once reserved for the pedestal are now the main body of his sculpture.

Twister (1981-82) is composed of a series of inverted, truncated pyramids stacked on top of one another. Each pyramidal block is subtly skewed both to the other blocks and to the rectangular base, thus animating the sculpture. In the earlier work the rectangular shape, now the base, was part of the body of the sculpture. In reversing those elements the base and body comprised, Culbreth investigates the function of shape. The interchange of shapes jars our sense of expected order and stretches the limits of anticipated association with those shapes. Moreover, the artist succeeds in synthesizing the individual elements of his sculpture into a unified whole.

Despite a general shift from round, tubular forms to geometric, architectural forms, Culbreth maintains some anthropomorphic elements from his earlier work. For example, the form on top of *Twister* echoes the heads of some of the anthropomorphic sculpture. That Culbreth has chosen to incorporate this particular element is significant since a head (mind) is the center of both creative and cognitive processes. Its representation underscores originality and identity. A head (which includes face and mind) distinguishes one person from another. Similarly, the clay "heads" endow each sculpture with an individual character. The head can also be perceived as a projection of the artist's self onto his creation. A symbolic analogue to the artist's own mind, the head imbues the sculpture with the artist's intelligence and creativity. (While a work of art is almost always a realization of an artist's sensibility, Culbreth's use of the head states this more concretely.)

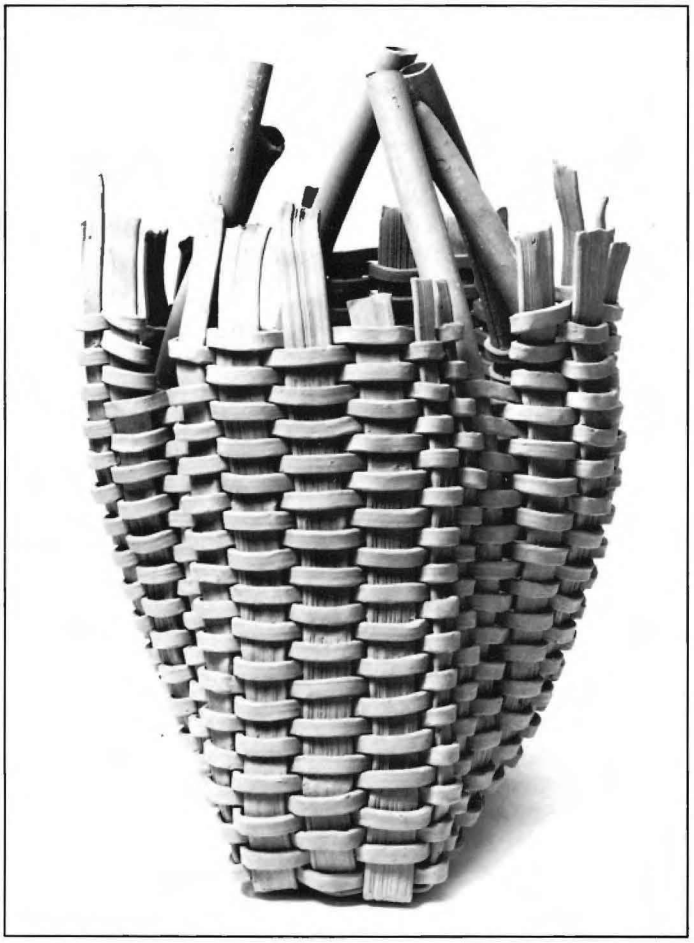
The top structure of *Twister* can be perceived in another way. With its irregular shape, its painted and textured surface, it alludes to a storm—a phenomenon of nature, as opposed to that of a man-made architectural world. The title *Twister* is significant, as it captures the dichotomy of the sculpture. "Twister" could refer to the relation of the different architectural parts, subtly twisting away from one another, or it could refer to a storm. This dual nature adds meaning to the piece. It also indicates the direction in which the artist is moving, constantly exploring, examining, and experimenting with increasingly potent forms.

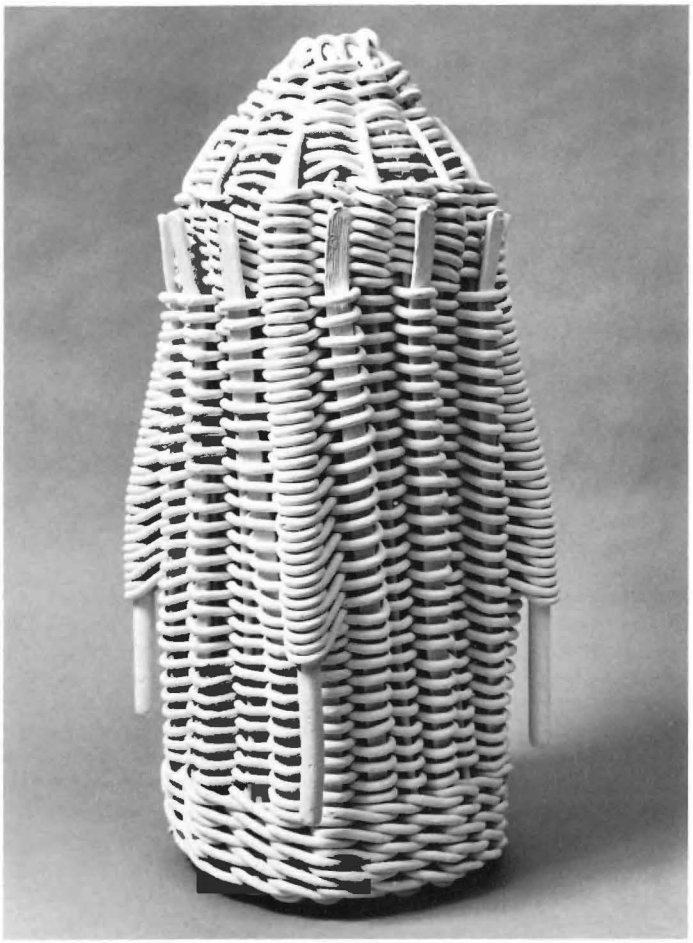
Carl Culbreth's recent sculpture was exhibited at Cooper/Lynn Gallery, New York (May 13–June 5, 1982).

Donna Harkavy is a freelance critic living in New York City.

Rina Peleg

Anthony Bannon





Rina Peleg's clay sculpture weaves a loose tapestry of references from the rich cultures of the ancient Middle East to a fascination with contemporary urban architecture. Yet finally, and for all of the New York artist's declarations of influences and origins, her basket-shaped clay-woven works provide rich occasions for light and a compelling oscillation between the appearance of great mass and the illusion of fragile grass.

Peleg's work deserves out-of-doors installation, for it casts shadows, gives shade, creates changing lattices of light, blocks vision, and demands viewing from all sides. At Artpark, the 200-acre, New York State-supported park for the arts located several miles down river from Niagara Falls, Peleg created a six- by three- by one-and-one-half-foot, 1,200-pound sculpture on a hill overlooking the gorge of the Niagara River. She was selected for a three-week summer residency in the park.

Terms of artists' residencies at Artpark are that the artists challenge their medium, take a risk, try something out that hasn't been tried before. Peleg had never built a piece this big; building it outside and firing in a kiln built around it didn't make things any easier.

Woven with plaited coils of clay pulled from an extruder, this Artpark work is conceptually similar to her previous pieces, though heroically scaled. The theme she explores is the shape of a flattened basket, woven as if with loose bands of straw that one is tempted to snap off or pull tight. Vertical support struts project beyond the weave, bending in various directions, as if to suggest an interrupted process. Those of her sculptures that do bend in the firing, whether in part or wholly along the face of a piece, infer the element of chance that finally rests at the root of what have now become the broad, expressive possibilities of clay.

Peleg's work suggests historical references, from vessel to adobe structure, while at the same time enriching that visual enterprise with the formality of abstracted concerns. Still, her work cannot avoid associations with primal, fecund imagery more connotatively endowed than even a basket or a dwelling. For sometimes a piece suggests the shape of an egg, at other times the gastrula, that open-ended, two-layered sac that appears in the early embryonic development of a complex organism.

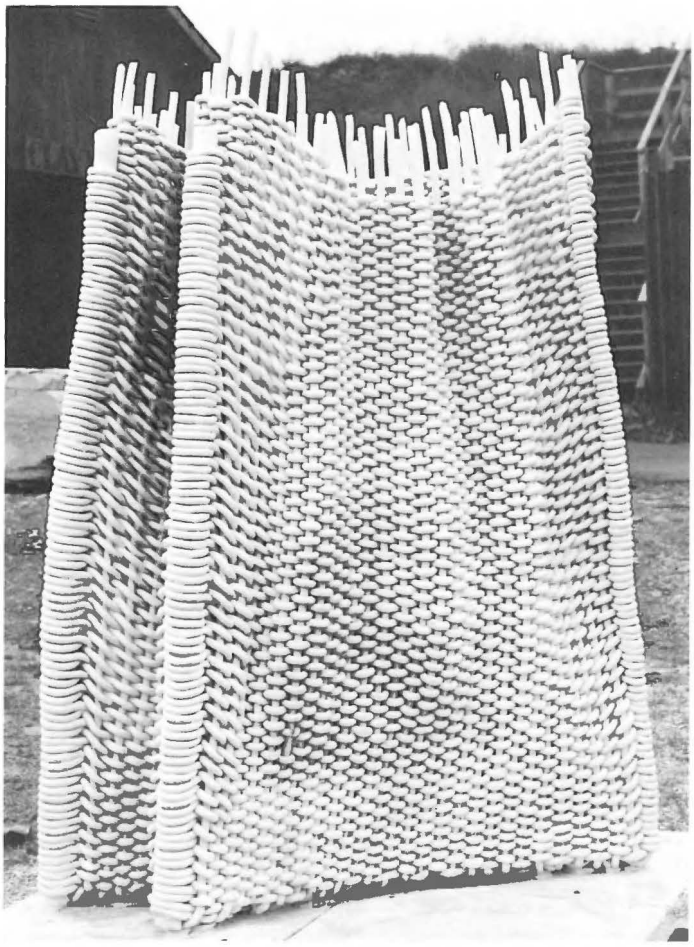
"I grew up in Israel on a kibbutz," the artist explains. "Almost everywhere one walked one practically stumbled over pottery pieces that are sometimes the only evidence of rich cultures that existed in the Middle East in the past. My first acquaintance with clay was made through these fragments." Although Peleg was graduated from the Bazalel Academy of Arts and Crafts in Jerusalem in 1960, her career did not blossom to its present concerns until her year of study at Alfred University in upstate

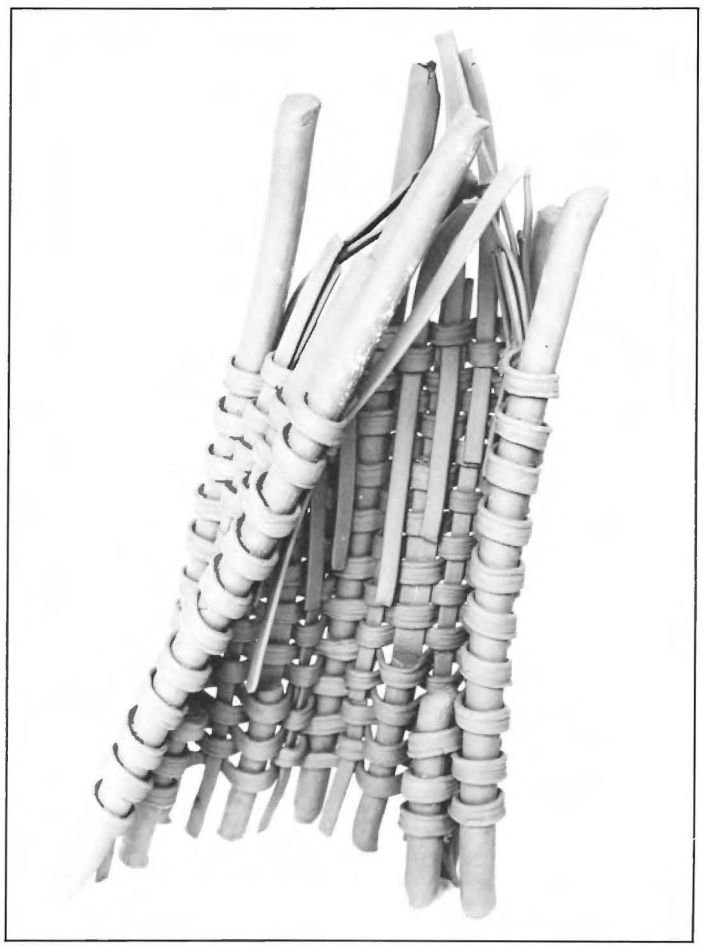
Untitled *(1981), 32" (81.3 cm) high.*

Untitled *(1981), 30" (76.2 cm) high.*

Untitled *(1982), 72" (183 cm) high.*

Untitled *(1981), 26" (66 cm) high.*





New York in 1980. "At Alfred I worked on handmade coiled-clay structures and a play of unconnected coils within these structures. This experience taught me that a coil may be used as rope or string is in weaving and plaiting. I decided to try to 'weave' using clay coils. Since these coils are the same coils used for traditional pinching, the transition to 'clay weaving' was simple—being one of concept and but a slight change in technique."

Peleg enjoys "the idea that fired clay is very stiff and strong, and it cannot move, but it *can* move before firing . . . it can bend like hair." And she fashions a piece into various thicknesses of coils, often up to three or four deep in places, and creates works of varying heights. Installed in a tasteful space, the work yields strong architectural values.

The Artpark residency presented the challenge of working outside, with the possibilities of rain, strong winds, heat, and humidity changing normal working patterns. "But I feel the clay is something you always can work out," explains Peleg. "It comes from outside, after all. . . . And coming back to nature is nice."

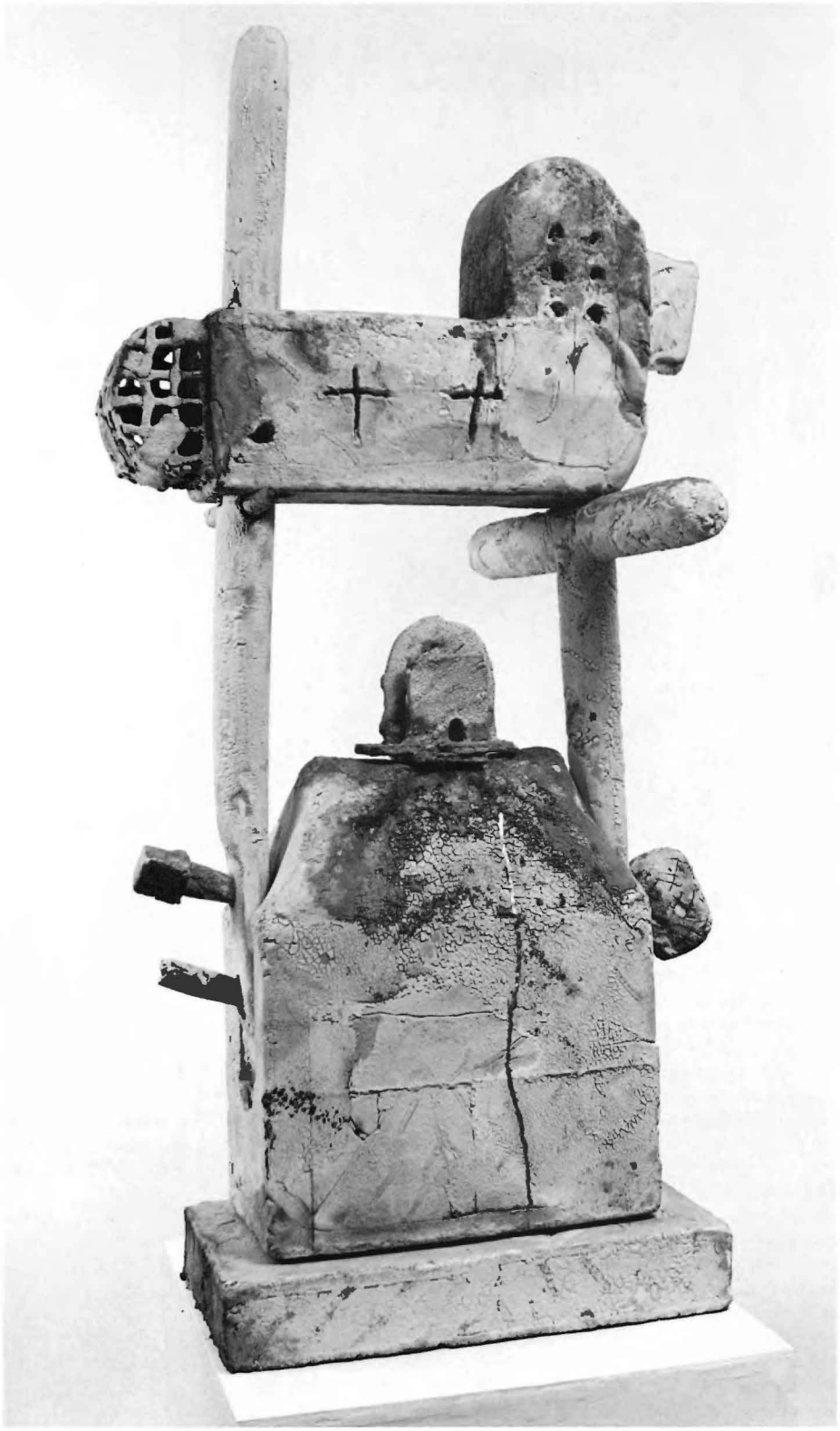
Size, of course, was the other problem. "I wanted to do something here that I had never done before, and when you do . . . you always risk something," she says. "Will it fall? What will happen? I was curious to see if it would stand. Sometimes I couldn't fall asleep, thinking about how it must support itself." It supported itself, and stood, and presented a new problem. Works produced at Artpark remain the property of the artist, who must either remove it or destroy it. Because of its size, lengthy travel would be difficult; Peleg now seeks a site for the work in western New York State.

Rina Peleg's ceramic sculpture was most recently on view at Nina Freudenheim Gallery, Buffalo, New York; Branch Gallery, Washington, D.C.; and Theo Portnoy Gallery, New York.

Anthony Bannon is the art critic for The Buffalo Evening News. *His most recent book is* The Taking of Niagara: A History of the Falls in Photography.

Sanctum Series I *(1982), 59¾" (151.8 cm) high.*

Red Jar *(1982), 16" (40.6 cm) high. Courtesy The Elements, New York. Photos: Bror Karlsson.*



Kris Cox

Sarah Bodine

Shiny yellow crackled raku; turquoise low-fire earthenware; iridescent mottled salt glaze; marbled neriage clay—the ceramic fad of the eighties is color, texture, and pattern. Fashion designers' pastel hues for spring grace handthrown dinnerware. Subtle airbrushing replaces crisp hand brushwork. New Wave graphics animate traditional utilitarian shapes.

In the sixties, California's climate and culture nurtured Abstract Expressionism in clay, freeing potters from the utilitarian tradition. The Voulkos school literally and figuratively punched holes in dull, brown functional ware and violated proper glazing technique by splashing its sculptural pots with Day-Glo, orange peel, and white paint.

In Kris Cox's work, the vessel-oriented East Coast and the Funk-oriented West Coast coexist. To date, his career has encompassed both influences—he received a BA at Claremont College and an MFA at Rhode Island School of Design. During 1980 alone, Cox's work ranged from tightly controlled, reduction-fired, porcelain plates with decorative brushwork, octagonal faceting, and tasteful saturated-iron glazes to self-glazed, asymmetric ceramic baskets. Potters like Cox, who previously thought that a conservative dinnerware production line was imperative for economic survival, are succumbing to the "School of Raw Energy," whose prerequisites are monumentality, disfigurement of clay forms, and "personal" statements. The Voulkos crew neatly paved the road for their development, their fast-clay establishments fueled by dangerous glaze chemicals and audacious modes of firing. The cool, shiny, sanitary enemy of the seventies has been purged—it's back to the basics of clay as texture and oxides as raw, tangible, almost edible, color. In fact, Cox surrounds his pieces with sawdust, vermiculite, rock salt, oxides, and chemicals, encases them in a steel drum, and then quickly fires them to raku temperatures.

But in formal concept, Cox deviates from West Coast Funk; his underlying shapes are recognizable allusions to classic Chinese models: vessels, portals, shrines. Even in his most sculptural *Sanctum Series* vestiges of the vessel infiltrate: lids, latticework spouts, little armlike handles. While some of the large stacked forms suggest ziggurats or wedding cakes, more conservative small jars directly mimic Oriental proportions, bulbous shapes, and narrow feet.

There's a difference, however: Cox's forms are energized by a wallop of intense, raw color. Aged, metallic orange red, iron yellow, copper blues and greens, punctuated by the sandy tan of the clay body, reverberate off the massive (up to seven feet tall) stacked arch forms. As rich as the oxidized green of the Statue of Liberty in bright sunlight, this monumental work is saved from being garish by the matt orange-peel surface. The work pulsates and seems to create its own light. As though dug up from ancient Chinese burial grounds, the pots exhibit debris clinging to the surface; gold rivulets patch the inevitable cracks from this brutal firing method; and poked, punched, and paddled alterations all testify to the ancient nature of this thoroughly modern work.

On close inspection, the unabashed freedom suggested by such harsh surfaces does not totally deceive, and the control evident in his porcelain dinnerware is apparent here as well. Formal elements, while asymmetric, are finely balanced; voids within the mammoth stacked pieces afford an airy lightness (difficult to obtain with clay), supportive clay columns tilt inward, invigorating the form. The composition is taut. Unlike the Voulkos school of stack-it-where-it-lies, this work is formalized, not slapdash. The pieces appear to have been carefully built or thrown, then altered. For all its bright intensity, the work is calm and soothing, more religious than rebellious, affirming and reviving a nostalgia for the formal beauty of traditional ceramics. The shock-of-color device is finely manipulated by Cox—the gleaming metallic of a minutely airbrushed dragster on the LA freeway, not a gouged jalopy after the demolition derby. Cox improvises on the bodies of classic roadsters. These vessels are the streamlined raku babies of the ceramic eighties.

The work discussed here was seen at The Elements, New York (May 4–June 5, 1982).

Sarah Bodine is a freelance writer, the editor of Metalsmith *magazine, and a potter living in Manhattan.*

The Marriage of Auntie Susanna *(1977), 31¼" (80.6 cm) high. Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Terry A. Collins.*

Bedroom Ewer *(1976), 19¾" (50.2 cm) high. Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, Los Angeles.*

The Frimkesses

Joanne Burstein

The Frimkess retrospective documents the work of Michael Frimkess in the vessel tradition and his collaboration with his wife Magdelena. It is a show containing contradictions—of temperament and technique—which at once make the work uniquely interesting and indicate why this member of the original Otis group has remained largely unknown outside the field. A level of technical mastery is immediately apparent, as is an air of passionate disclaimer. In each piece something is "wrong"—a clumsy join, a sagging lip, an incongruous image in decoration. To understand these humorous disclaimers, the viewer is required to understand both the historic and technical vocabularies of ceramics.

One is confronted with a group of predominantly large vessel forms, classic statements of ceramic history. There is a gloriously colorful "Chinese" ginger jar depicting Santa Claus, a lecherous Uncle Sam, and a monkey-businessman; an elegant Islamic hookah over three feet tall; Greek red-on-black ware with Matisse-like sprinters, a Picasso woman, and the disenfranchised poor. Works without figurative content are also masterfully thrown and decorated, but even these possess a comic irony that mocks the idea of perfection and skews it toward other meanings. Perfection is the gift thrown away in an imperfect world. These are not imitations of the world's great pottery, but plays on form very similar to the current quotations of art history by painters David Salle, Sandro Chia, and Francesco Clemente.

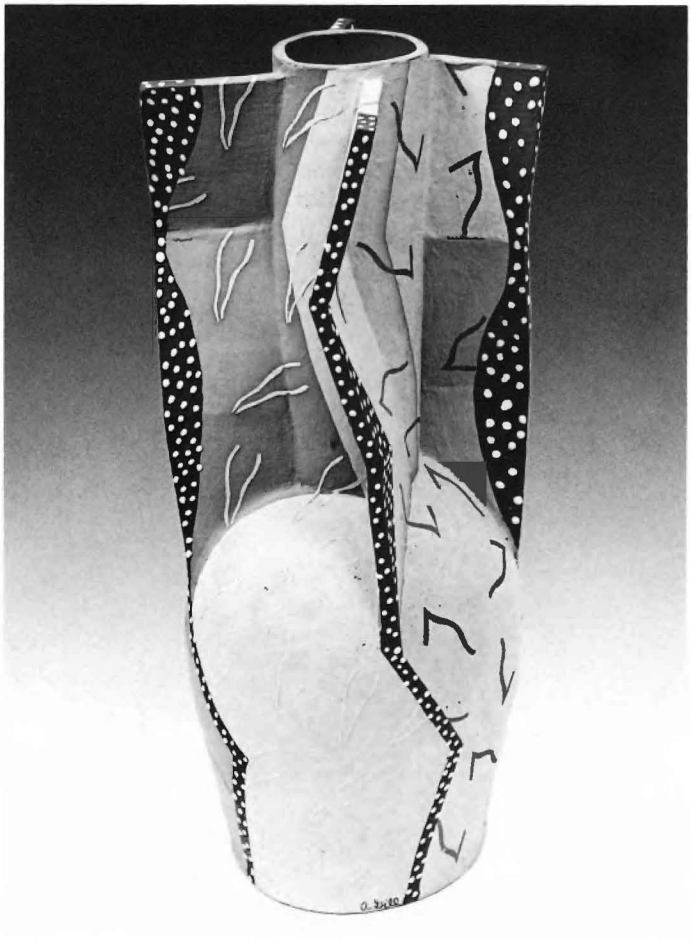
Looking closer at the recurring imagery, with its political and sexual content, we realize the forms are based on what has been honored from the past, but the hand that made them is in the immediacy of the present. Their modernity is often subtly conveyed, as in a large celadon storage jar with two humorous drips of glaze (1960s fashion) dangling from its lip, or more literally in a Zuñi bowl with its depiction of strikers marching for the Farmworkers cause in the early seventies.

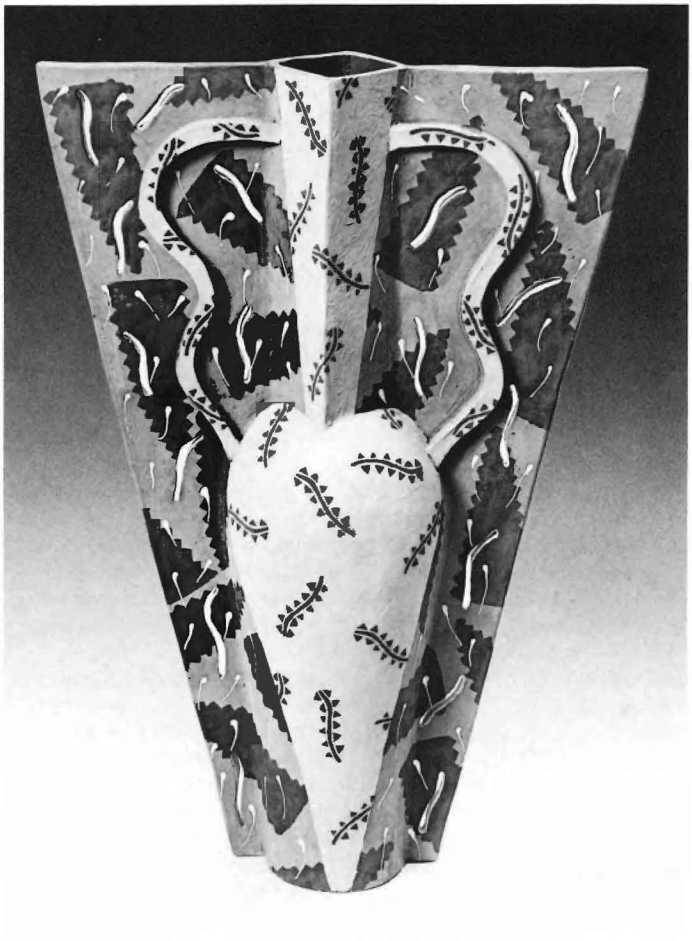
Behind this work lies a precocious talent and, if catalogue statements can be trusted, a talent more *drawn* to ceramics than committed to it. For example, there is a five-year gap in this retrospective, when Michael apparently abandoned the vessel to work in sculpture of clay, metal, and combinations of the two. Actually, his sculpture of the late fifties and early sixties was the kind of sexually and politically oriented work that became more literal and more literary with Funk, more personal with feminist art, and more specific in its politics with antiwar art later in the decade. When he returned to the vessel, in the late sixties, his stance was still ironic, with explicit social criticism. However, Frimkess continued to appropriate traditional pottery forms by overlaying them with his own personal subject matter. Thus, the more classical the form, the more personal the statement.

It is in the later work, decorated by Magdelena, that the ironic stance is replaced by a painter's preference for formal beauty. This shift toward the aesthetic makes the work more accessible, in that the humor of the earlier work carried the threat that the joke might be on us. However, the edge of disorienting irony removed from the later work leaves a void beauty alone is not able to fill. The sensibility shifts from parody to imitation—exquisite imitation at that—but the work no longer marks a unique moment in time.

This Southern California renegade has run through the pages of ceramic history and transformed everything he has touched with his singular combination of sensuousness and ideal justice. His repeated return to the classic Greek vessel over the fifteen-year span of his work may indicate the artist's intuition that perhaps only once before was there a time and place that could have accommodated this unique sensibility.

"Michael and Magdelena Frimkess: A Retrospective View, 1956–1980" was held at Garth Clark Gallery, Los Angeles (April 3–May 4, 1982).





Spiral Jar *(1982), 24" (61 cm) high. Courtesy The Elements, New York. Photo: Bror Karlsson.*

Double Yellow Vase *(1982), 28" (71 cm) high. Courtesy The Elements, New York. Photo: Bror Karlsson.*

Andrea Gill

Susan Wechsler

Caught between painting and sculpture, ceramic objects often defy traditional artworld categories. Certainly there is successful ceramic sculpture, but a great deal more work straddles an uncomfortable edge and denies the tradition from which it could ultimately derive its strength. Many who work in clay have rejected all associations with pottery in the scramble to gain acceptance as mainstream artists.

By contrast, Andrea Gill embraces the traditions, concepts, and styles of pottery making; in fact, she employs them to question our ideas of pottery. Since the retinal contour of a pot, or what the eye perceives, is expressed by a line, Gill draws multiple images of vases on the surface of a vessel to confuse its identity. Our apprehension of the "vessel" is constantly shifting about from one overlayed image of a vase to another. Ultimately, these surface illusions playfully juxtapose volume, edge, and line—the elements which identify a vessel form.

This sophisticated use of draftsmanship leads to additional questioning about the purpose of vessel making. Gill floats painted flowers and foliage over the surface of a vase that would normally hold flowers, making its function superfluous. Contradiction and ambiguity is also stressed by the holes she occasionally pierces through the pot's surface. The light which passes through, while outlining another vase image, also lifts the pot from its earthbound connotations.

Because of her dazzling use of pattern painting, we are almost unable to decipher the surface from its form. The artist further heightens the play of flat surface pattern against the form's actual contour by manipulating the shape of the vessel itself. Most often she accomplishes this by equipping her pots with winglike appendages or flanges that comouflage the central vase configuration we expect to find. Our notion of spatial depth is altered and continues to shift between two and three dimensions. In *Spiral Vase* for example, flat slab appendages are oriented at angles around the central and main "vase" image. When viewed against the overlayed surface patterns, they appear as a continuous, curved spiral. Illusions of what is real (three dimensional) and what is imagined (two dimensional), what is fullbodied and what is flat, tease and confuse us.

The transformations of some of Gill's vessels into figurative forms plays on pottery's figurative traditions, while confounding them. These are figures *and* vessels—open all the way down to their centers like pots. Influenced by primitive art, Italian folk painting, and religious shrines, Gill presents us with women emerging from anthropomorphic pots—heads are containers with bowl-shaped hats, faces bulge from the central swell of the pot, headdresses are formed by the neck of the vase. In the least successful ones, the shapes are almost literally translated—the body of the vase becomes the body of the woman. These are too close to the knicknacks one might find in a gift shop. But the newer shrines, more cleverly modeled and carved, closer to folk art traditions, describe their space in an intriguing manner. Veiled women emerge from hollow enclosures resembling niches, while their backgrounds form a decorated wall, an architectural setting as well as the surface of a vessel.

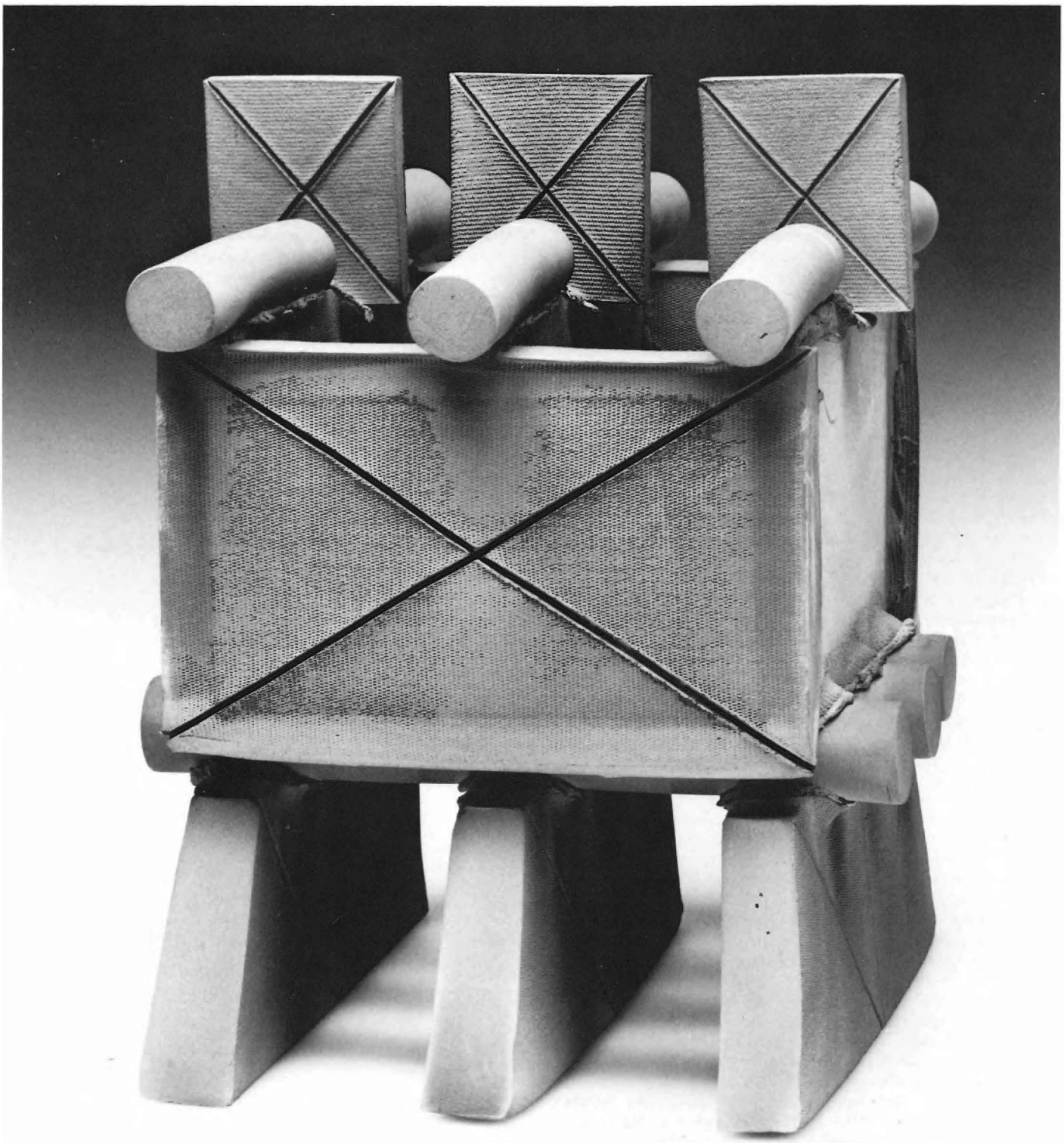
Perhaps Gill's complete commitment to the vessel form explains the extreme neutrality of the figures. Faces are kept bland, their direct straight-ahead orientation not unlike that found in medieval painting, without modeling, shading, perspective, or depth. These are benign, cool, seemingly self-satisfied women who do not engage us emotionally. Although Gill's sense of humor and wit are much in evidence, her talents seem focused on the arrangement of the women's costuming or styling. The results are pleasing, but their immobile, placid beauty *does* begin to disturb. Many artists who use the figure to confront personal, psychological, or narrative issues might criticize these figures as complacent or facile.

Regardless of her figurative intentions, Gill's primary purpose is to make decorative pots; they remain foremost a vehicle for the skillful painting she employs to pattern her pieces. Intrigued by the Majolica technique accomplished through painstaking brushwork, the artist has succumbed to a highly decorative style. The newer pieces, slip-painted in deep colors, are bold and expressive. However decorative the work, it manages still to successfully challenge our perceptions about pottery concepts, and in the process, provides us with a splendid visual treat.

This show was viewed at The Elements, New York (June 8–July 10, 1982).

Susan Wechsler is a New York-based writer and the author of Low-Fire Ceramics *(Watson-Guptill Publications, 1981).*

Untitled *(1982), 16½" (42 cm) high. Photo: Rick Paulson.*



Walt Gordinier

Louise Klemperer

The initial impact of Walt Gordinier's new work is immediate and strong. On further looking, however, I found myself confronted by a number of contradictions and paradoxes. The relationship of this work to the vessel is the first. Gordinier has been working primarily with handbuilt box forms since 1975, moving further and further from the wheel-thrown pots that were his introduction to clay. Yet Gordinier, like many ex-potters, refuses to let go of the vessel concept completely—which is fine, but the relationship needs clarification. The present work may be divided into three groups, each characterized by a different use of the idea of vessel as container. The descriptions that follow relate to specific pieces, but are fairly typical for their group.

The first series continues along the lines of Gordinier's previous work. Here, the box surface is penetrated by protruding sheaves of thin, irregularly shaped slabs. The box sits on supporting rods that extend about half an inch beyond the front and back walls; the rods, in turn, are elevated by three low slabs placed on their edges. The front view, with its smoky gray, square-box end flanked by receding rows of large, elephant-ear-shaped slabs, has a commanding presence. It seems to elaborately and beautifully protect its mysterious contents. This strong sense of enclosure, one of its most striking features, is also its link to the vessel.

The enclosure, however, is in illusion. The mystery quickly dissipates as we peer into the bottomless interior, down through open spaces between the unadorned supporting bars to the sculpture's exhibit stand. There are not enough details to even visually suggest a bottom boundary to contain our gaze. Whereas in a Graham Marks form, inside cannot be logically deduced from outside (this very contradiction being one of its strengths), here the opposite is true—the inside reveals the mechanical structure of the whole. While Marks gives more than you hoped for, Gordinier gives less.

The second group of boxes are all low and have evolved from a basket format. This group is quite successful. The first in the series has a handle-shaped arch, but in subsequent pieces Gordinier dispensed with the handle to better concentrate on the interiors, where all activity and interest occurs. Vessel is translated into confining wall, like a frame around a painting. Within this orderly edge, Gordinier has worked through a series of different interiors, filling in the bottoms more than he has in the taller forms. The most recent piece is the most dramatic; small rectangles of clay, their ends embedded in the supporting lattice, jut out at irregular angles.

The final group utilizes the vessel idea of containment in a complex way. From a distance, curiosity about their contents attracted me. But as I approached the most interesting box, the strong X's scribed on the body and on three small squares atop it brought me to a stop. I was then held at bay by the top-mounted clay bars, which project like gun barrels. This intriguing work first lured, then repelled: there was no place in which to stand still long enough to view it.

This series of variations on a vessel concept is just one way Gordinier lets us know he's working with clay. He strikes a balance between the gestural qualities of bulges, sags, and dents, and his predominantly geometric format. He also allows some of the joining slip to show in small amorphic globs, and retains the minute surface variations on the slabs and bars (they are visibly not machine made). Further, he has developed a process of fuming acrylic resin paints, resulting in hues and gradations of color very similar to raw clay in various stages of drying and bisque. These "natural" qualities are effectively opposed to the right-angled forms which speak of Gordinier's love of bridges and freeway construction forms.

Less successful are the two contradicting apparent attitudes. The massive proportions and somber colors read "serious," yet the small upturned squares and numerous other parts seem fanciful. Although lighthearted touches appear in all pieces, they are not enough to convince us to take these works in a playful spirit. The third group is the most ambiguous. These look like fort constructions a ten-year-old would gleefully (and not as skillfully) put together, yet they are simultaneously very powerful. The size contributes to the confusion—a little smaller and they would be like toys, a little larger and they would overwhelm.

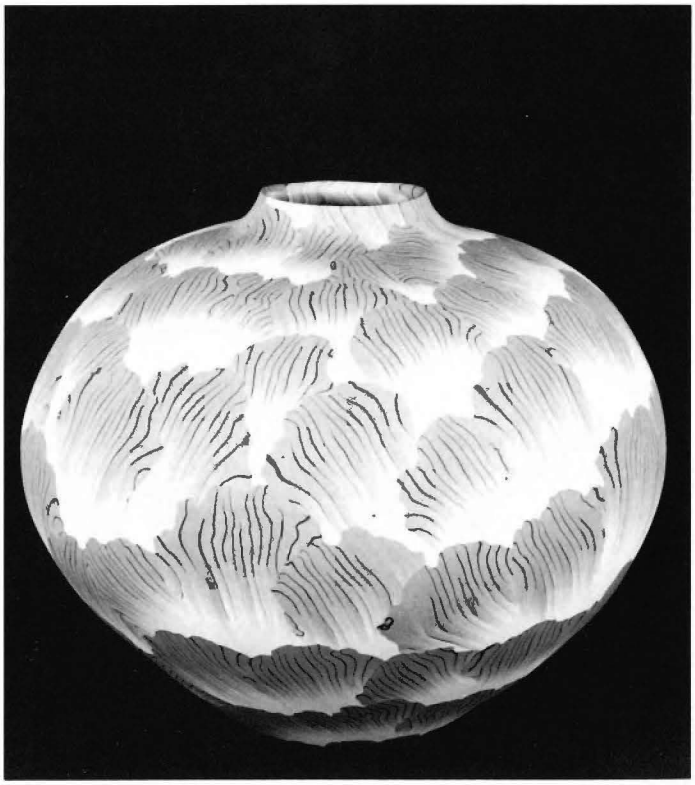
The final paradox is that while these substantial pieces strongly proclaim their presence, they have little effect on the surrounding space. They neither project (until you're quite close) nor, after you have once peered inside, do they possess any intense sense of inwardness.

Two choices seem possible for Gordinier. He can abandon all concern with vessel-type enclosures and work with other formal problems, or he can resolve his inconsistencies and continue to use the container idea. As it stands, he has not developed some of his powerful forms far enough to maintain the impact they promise on first viewing.

The work by Walt Gordinier discussed here was exhibited at Contemporary Crafts Gallery, Portland (June 3–July 3, 1982).

Louise Klemperer is a freelance critic living in Portland, Oregon.

(Clockwise from top right) Jar *(1982), 14″ (35.6 cm) high;* Jar *(1982), 11″ (28 cm) high;* Vase *(1982) 9½″ (24 cm) high.*



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Thomas Hoadley

Michael Stone

Thomas Hoadley is among those rare ceramists whose work successfully integrates form *and* surface, in contrast with today's trend to focus on either form or painting. Hoadley achieves this integration by creating the structure of his vessels and their surface designs in one process. The method he uses is *nerikomi,* a complex Japanese technique of manipulating layers of colored clays to create patterns of interacting lines and color. Slices of the mixture are pressed into a mold; how the layers are arranged determines the image on the surface. The layers can be spread so thinly that they appear to melt into each other. By twisting, folding, and stretching the stack of clays, Hoadley generates a maelstrom of swirling lines and color that is captured or, as Hoadley says, "frozen," to reveal the vibrant exchanges of line and color.

Hoadley uses only porcelain in his work, since its fine texture provides the best medium for revealing the subtle lines he creates with nerikomi. The surfaces are left matt; since decoration is incorporated in the structure, glazes are superfluous. And even a clear glaze tends to obscure the delicate figures in the clay.

Hoadley uses nerikomi to create an illusion of depth and three-dimensionality with his patterns. By contrasting dark areas of colored porcelain with sections of white clay, part of the pattern appears to rise from the surface, or recede deep into the sides of the vessel. When the slices of nerikomi are arranged so that they grow darker in color as they ascend the sides of the pot, light seems to radiate from within the vessel. When the gradation is reversed—from dark to light—the light source appears to be external. In some of the more intricate patterns, the interplay of color gives the surface the appearance of having a jagged texture. This illusion dissolves upon touching the vessel, however, for it feels smooth and polished—the result of hours of scraping and sanding.

Hoadley accomplishes another feat of trompe l'oeil with his bowls. Since the surface pattern is integral to the clay, we see the same image on the inside of a bowl as on the outside. This momentarily causes the illusion that the walls are transparent and that we are looking through the sides to another surface.

Hoadley has strayed from his goal of synthesizing form and surface in some more recent pieces. In these, he makes a loaf of marbled clay and then uses slices from the loaf to build the walls of his pots. He also inlays sections of marbled clay into plates or the sides of pots. This is least effective when he inlays nerikomi squares into a contrasting nerikomi background. The result is surfeit and argues that the technique is most appropriate when the vessel's surface is allowed to evolve in conjunction with its form.

By working in a limited number of classic shapes—bowls, jars, vases, and plates—Hoadley avoids a conflict between his forms and their elaborate patterns. His success stems from his ability to resist imposing too much of himself on the work. Although he controls the materials, he also allows the shape of the vessel to dictate its surface pattern. This shows particular restraint since he was trained as a sculptor.

Hoadley generally works with one to three colors in a single piece (choosing among taupe, slate blue, gray, coral, reddish brown, and black). The kiln firing bleaches out the bright colors and results in soft muted shades that are often likened to those found in sand and rocks, such as granite and slate. Similarly, the marbled effect has been compared to the colorful layering found in sedimentary rocks and soil by Ban Kajitani, a potter who uses *neriage,* a similar technique.

Thomas Hoadley's honesty is refreshing. He avoids the all too common temptation to use his vessels as substitute canvases or clay sculptures. His work illustrates the effectiveness of considering form and surface simultaneously.

Thomas Hoadley's work was exhibited at The Clay Pot, Brooklyn, New York (April 3–29, 1982).

Michael Stone is a freelance writer based in New York City.

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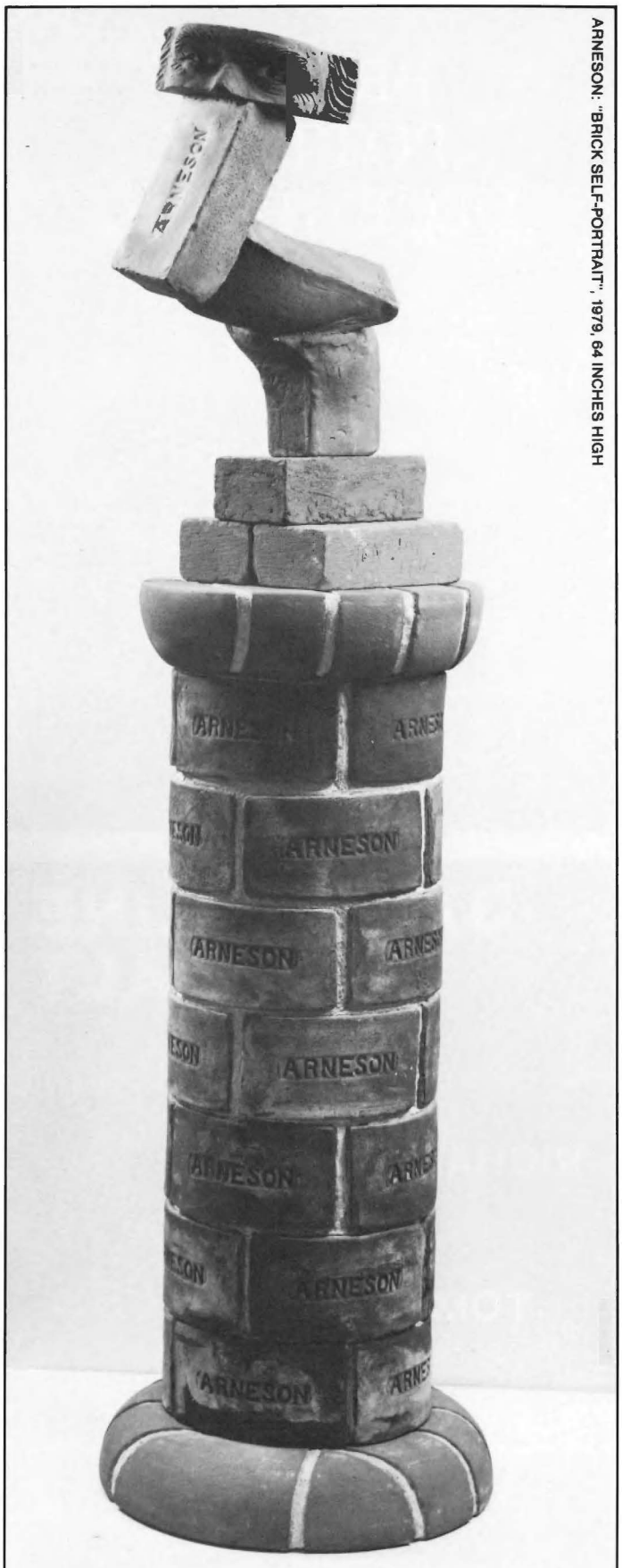

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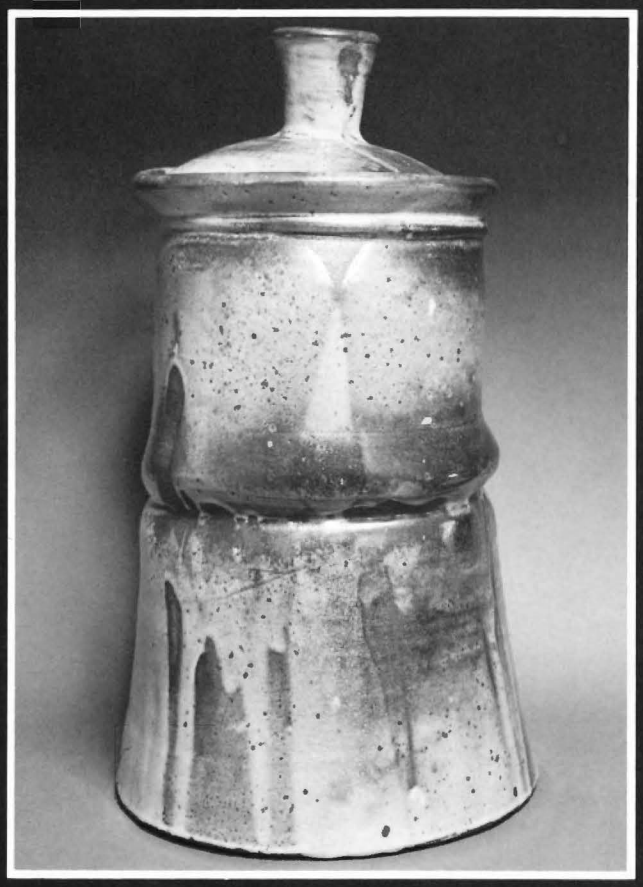

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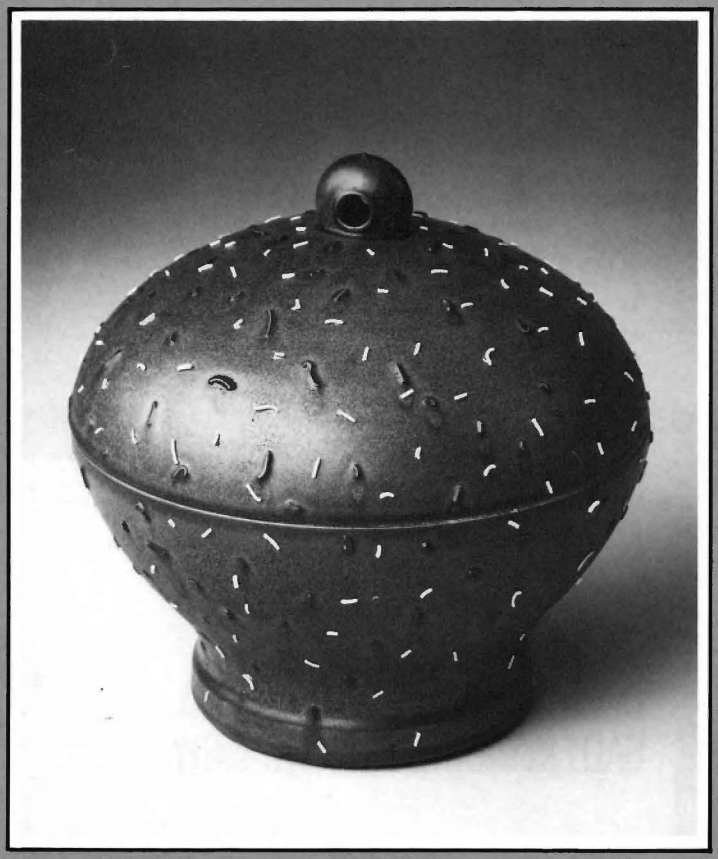

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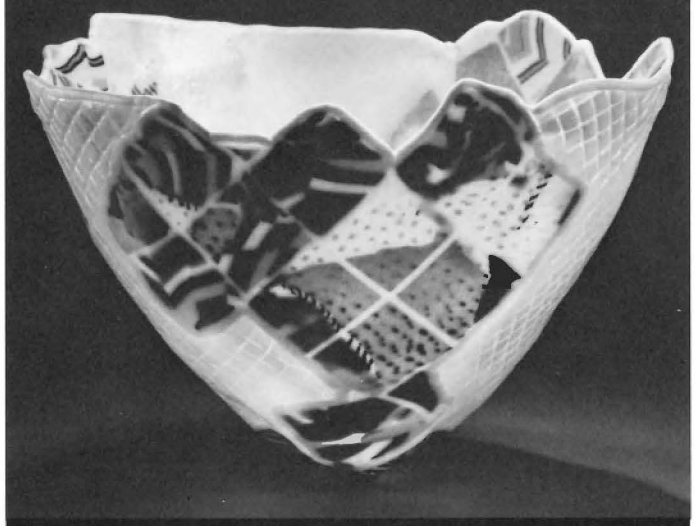

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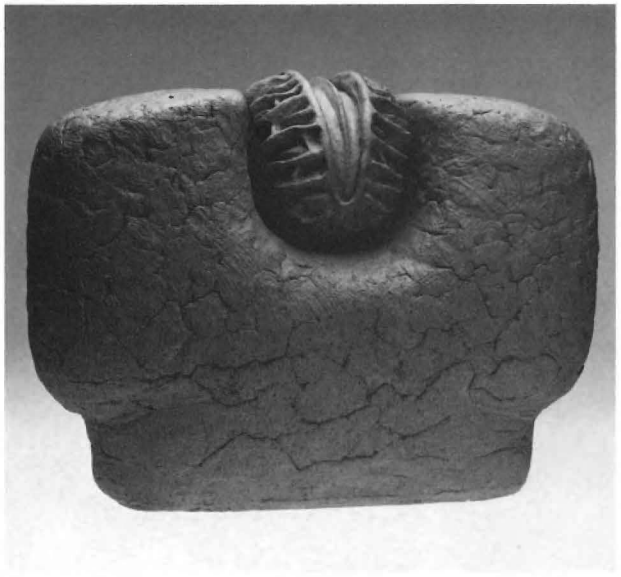

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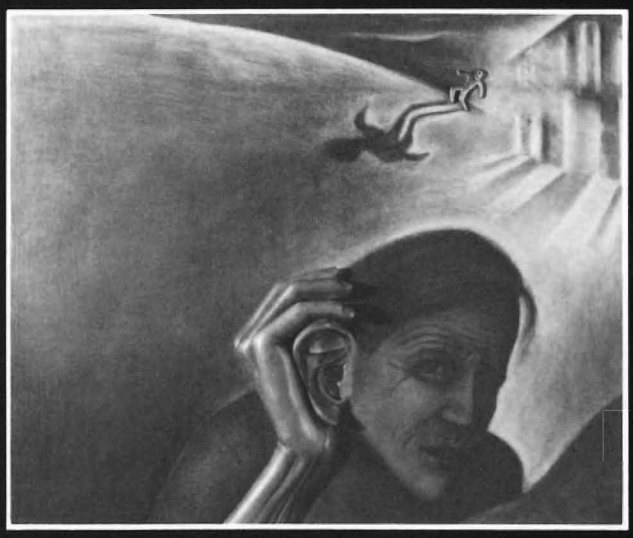

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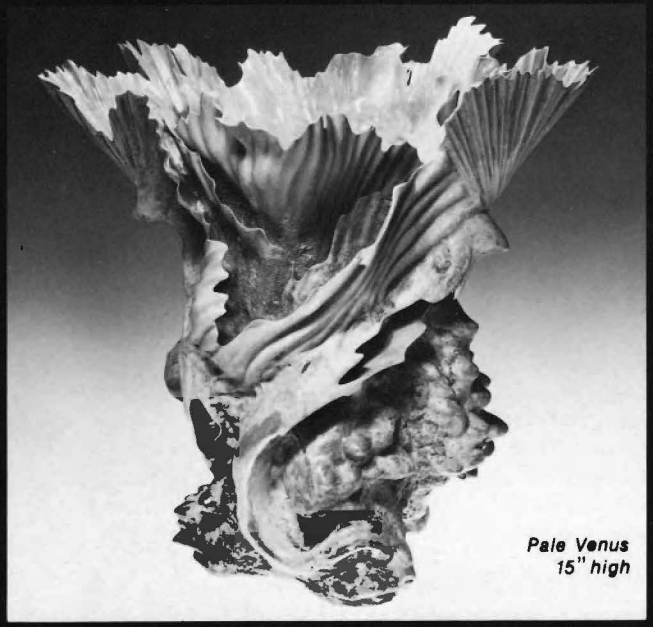

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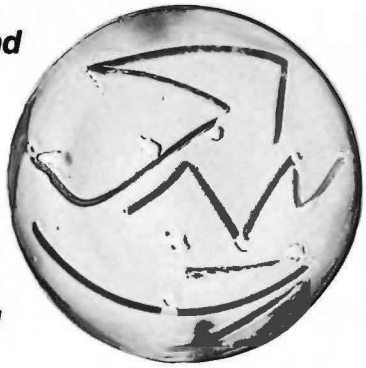

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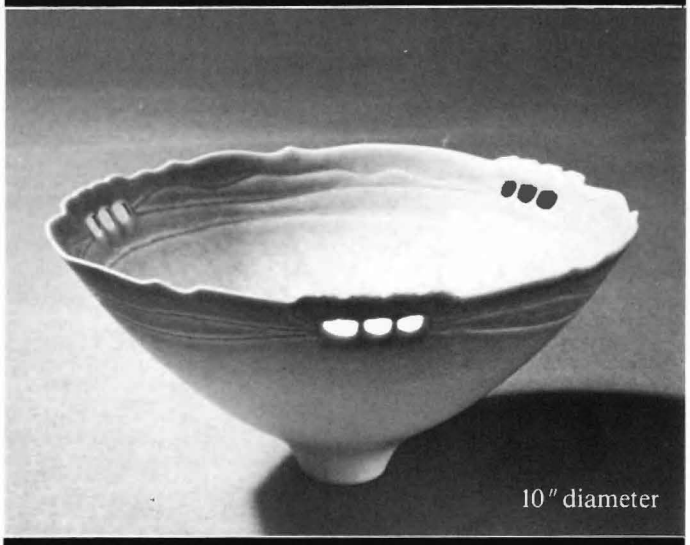

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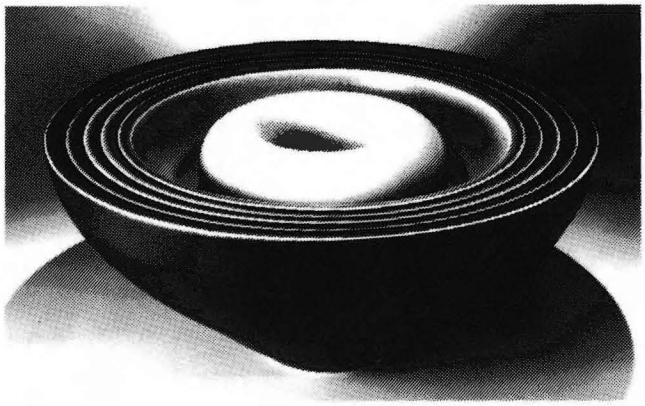

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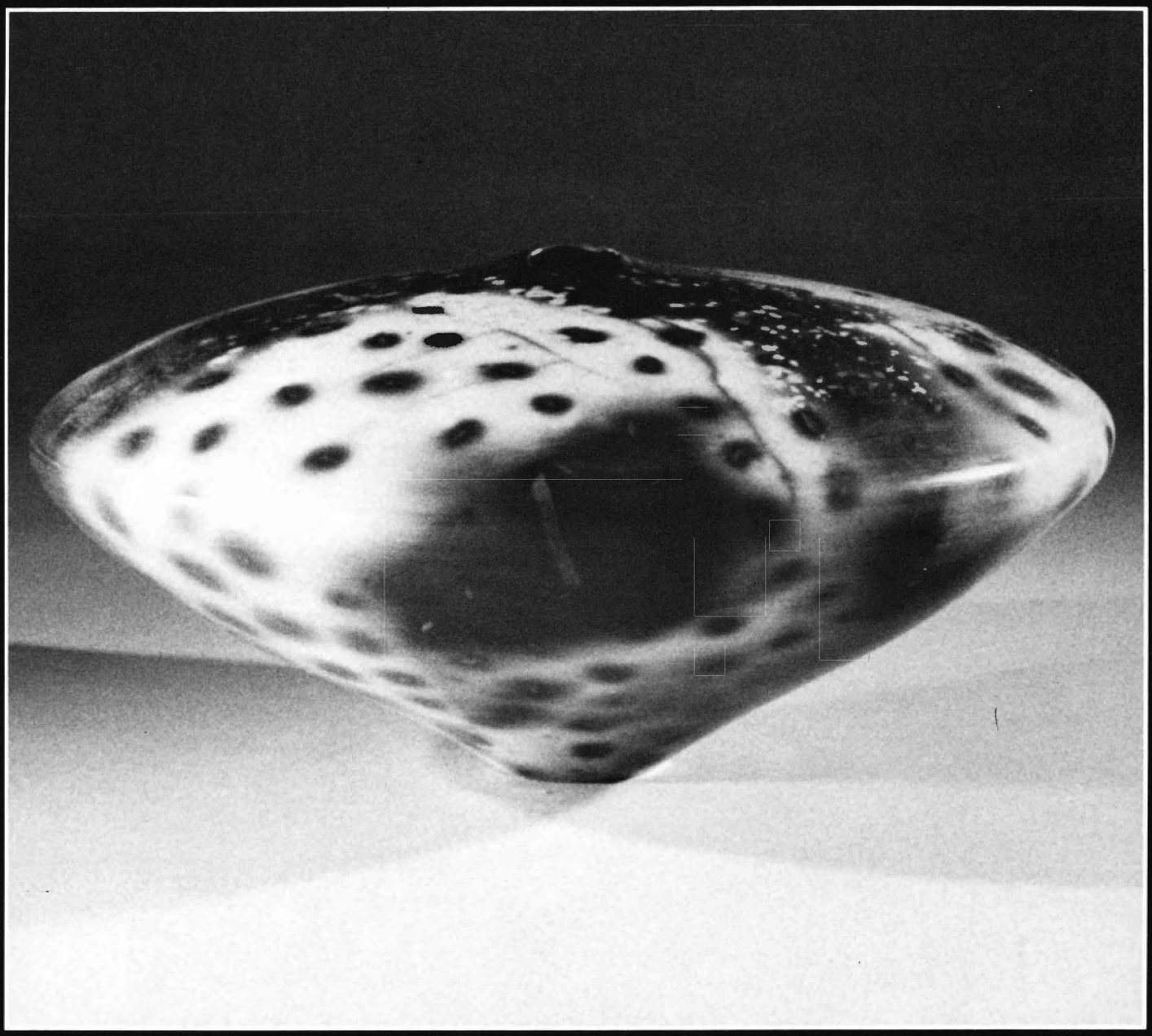

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